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Vol. XXIV. Published Every Wednesday. Beadle & Adams, Publishers, 98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., September 3, 1884. Ten Cents a Copy. \$5.00 a Year. No. 306

THE ROUGHS OF RICHMOND; Or, The Mystery of the Golden Beetle.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "ELECTRO PETE," "HANK HOUND," "THE FRENCH SPY," ETC., ETC., ETC.



ERMINIE SAW SOMETHING LIKE A STREAK OF FIRE PASS DIRECTLY BETWEEN HERSELF AND THE DETECTIVE. JO CALL REELED BACKWARD A STEP, AND SUNK TO THE SWORD.

The Roughs of Richmond;

OR,

The Mystery of the Golden Beetle.

A Life Drama of the Famous
Southern Capital.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "ELECTRO PETE," "HANK HOUND,"
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CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE OF FRANKLIN STREET.
THE half-moon of a balmy May evening shone over the streets and buildings of the historic city of Richmond.

The hour, in the vicinity of Monroe Park, was very still.

Pedestrians were few and far between; even at the time—about half-past ten o'clock—the people seemed to have retired at least to the seclusion of their houses, if not to bed.

But there was a monotoned tramp along Franklin street—like the tramp of soldiery, or like the tramp of trained policemen, which latter it was.

A squad of half a dozen officers, four of them carrying something with projecting handles at each end, were slowly and carefully making their way toward a house on Franklin street.

Dully their footsteps echoed upon the silent walls of the dwellings around, and there was an ominous hush among them.

Before a magnificent abode they halted.

One advanced and rung the bell.

The answer to the summons was tardy, but when at last a servant opened the door, the leader of the squad said:

"This is the home of Dorsey Fenwick, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

And then glancing at the object which the others were holding, in apparent readiness to enter, the servant exclaimed:

"What is it? What has happened?—anything to Mr. Fenwick?"

"We would like to see Mrs. Fenwick at once, if she can be seen. Hurry, there! Forward, men!" and in obedience to the order the officers started forward, following their leader, who seemed to be sufficiently familiar with the house to march them directly into the side parlor at the rear.

The alarmed servant, with one final glance at the uniformed comers and the object which they bore between them, ran up the stairs to the boudoir of her mistress.

"Set the pallet there," said the officer in command, pointing to one side. "And range yourselves in front of it, to hide it as much as possible, while I exchange a word with the lady."

It was not long before Mrs. Fenwick appeared upon the exciting but indefinite information brought her by the servant, who had burst into her apartments with the cry:

"Oh, madam! The house is full of policemen. And I believe something has happened to Mr. Fenwick. And they want to see you at once down-stairs!"

Hastening down, Mrs. Fenwick paused just inside the door-sill to gaze at the officers.

"Is this Mrs. Fenwick?"

"It is," she replied, rather coolly.

If the leader of the squad had expected to see the lady at all discomposed by the ominous significance of their presence, he was disappointed.

In voice and manner she was perfectly self-controlled.

And while he paused to mark this, he also observed that Mrs. Fenwick was a remarkable woman in appearance for one of her years, which he had cause to judge must be somewhere among the forties.

She really looked to be no more than thirty, with sparkling brown eyes, a beautiful face with smooth skin that evidently had not been made so by any appliance of art.

Of finely-proportioned figure, and at the moment attired in a gorgeous evening dress, with carefully and richly-arranged hair, besides various jewels upon neck and hands that shone resplendent beneath the chandelier, she was, truly, a picture of womanhood that would have arrested any beholder.

There was a latent fire in the brown eyes, too, which could not fail to be noticed; and the coolness with which she addressed the officer only served to indicate that she possessed a complete control over herself.

"I am afraid I have brought you some very sad intelligence, madam," he said, after that brief though almost staring glance.

"Of what character, sir?"

"In relation to your husband—if you are—"

"Yes, I have told you that I am Mrs. Fenwick. Pray, what has occurred, if anything, regarding Mr. Fenwick?"

Still he seemed to hesitate.

Then, with mustered courage—and while the others, at a signal from him, made an opening in the little rank, at the same time averting

their heads, as if they did not wish to see what might ensue—he advanced to the improvised pallet, which they had borne thither, saying:

"Your husband has met with a fatal accident, madame, and we have brought him to you," pointing downward.

Her face paled slightly as she followed his movements.

The next minute, she advanced and turned down the white covering that was on the surface of the pallet, revealing to herself the face of a dead man.

During a few seconds she gazed.

"It is Mr. Fenwick," she said, in a subdued way.

"Yes. We knew who it was by the papers found on his person."

"And he is dead?" more husbly.

"The physician who was immediately summoned said that he could hardly live until brought home. Yes, he is dead, I think."

With a very white face, but without the slightest tremulousness, she turned to him.

"I am obliged to you. Will you do me the further favor of sending the nearest undertaker here?"

"Certainly, madam."

She returned her gaze to the corpse on the pallet.

The officers, appreciating what they considered to be a terrible effort at self-control by this beautiful wife, silently obeyed a motion from their leader and filed from the room out to the street.

The stillness of death was now in one house on Franklin street.

When they had gone, the beautiful woman re-covered the face of the dead man and glided away.

In her room she summoned the girl who had brought her the intelligence of the arrival of the police.

"Plura?"

"Yes, madam."

"You know where the detective agency is—near Capitol square?"

"Oh, yes, madam. The name is—"

"The name of the firm is Call & Tuff. I wish to see Mr. Call, and that as quickly as possible. Take this note"—seating herself at a small writing desk and dashing off a few lines rapidly—"to Mr. Call if he is in, and leave it for him if he is not. Do you understand perfectly?"

"Yes, madam," as she received the note.

"And another thing, Plura—"

"Well, madam?"

"Do not have too much gossip on your tongue for the other servants when you mingle with them in the morning. I mean about Mr. Fenwick. He has simply been brought home so hurt that he died while being brought here—you understand?"

"Yes, madam." And the girl could not suppress the cry: "Oh, madam, isn't it awful!"

"Hush! That will do. Begone on your errand, Plura."

As the girl descended the stairs to depart upon her mission, she was wondering:

"What a strange woman is the madam! She has not dropped one tear—and the master here in the house suddenly dead—violently dead, I am sure. Were it my husband, I should weep my eyes out, I am sure."

Hardly had the maid departed, when a young and beautiful girl appeared at the door of Mrs. Fenwick's room—her daughter, Erminie.

The young girl had retired; but the unusual sound of so many tramping feet in the hall below had aroused her, and she now stood at her mother's door with a face set in both curiosity and apprehension.

"What has happened, mother?"

"Ah, Erminie—you?"

"I heard such sounds as we never have in the house, mother, except when we have company. What is it?"

"Your father, Erminie, has met with an accident."

"But—but it is nothing serious, mother?" in a quick gasp.

"Come with me."

She took her daughter's hand in her own and led the way to the parlor below.

Here she pointed to the pallet.

With a whitened face and unsteady step, the girl advanced and grasped the covering over the stiff form.

Then a pealing cry burst from her lips:

"My father! He is dead!"

"Dead, Erminie."

Mrs. Fenwick stepped forward just in time to support the tottering form of her child.

But the faint feeling passed quickly.

"How did it happen? Who did it? What does it all mean?" were the next quickly-uttered words.

A queer look came over the beautiful face of the mother—a face no less young in appearance than that of Erminie, a girl of no more than eighteen years.

"You would like to know what it means, Erminie?" in that strangely deep voice which was sometimes hers.

"Yes, Oh, yes!"

"Come, and you shall see. I will show to you the curse of the Fenwicks. I suppose you

will wonder that I exhibit no agitation over this occurrence; but when I tell you I have expected it for some time, you will no longer wonder."

"The curse of the Fenwicks? What does that mean, mother?"

"As I have said, you shall see—now that your father is dead. I would not have shown it to you while he lived; it was forbidden."

Mother and daughter ascended the staircase, leaving it at the first landing and passing along a narrow corridor which led to an apartment appropriated in the past solely to the use of Dorsey Fenwick as a library.

"There has been brooding over this house, Erminie, a pall of violent danger to some one for a period of many months," said Mrs. Fenwick, as they pursued their way along the corridor. "I knew that some member of our family would soon be called away by death, and my mind, for a term, has been under a fearful strain. It has come at last—as I well knew it would, and as your own father knew it would before this calamity befell him. But before I say more, let me show you something."

Entering the library, she added:

"Stand there, Erminie. I will reveal to you a secret."

At one side of the library there was an alcove screened by heavy curtains of green that looked twice green in the dull rays of an argand burner which had always been a favorite with Dorsey Fenwick.

Mathilde Fenwick advanced to the curtains.

"You may prepare yourself, my child, for a strange sight," she said, pausing with one hand on the curtains.

Erminie was silent.

She had not been admitted to her father's library for many months, by a strict order from both father and mother.

Something seemed to divert her mind at the moment from the dead body of her parent lying below; she gazed upon her mother and upon the mysterious green curtains beyond which she had never been allowed to pass, even in the days of her privilege in the library.

Mathilde Fenwick raised the curtain slowly.

And it was a strange sight that her action revealed—something like a vision prepared by a conjurer for mystifying purposes.

In a niche was a raised slab, the top of which was of black or blackened marble, its edges being of brilliant gilt.

On the top of the slab was something that resembled a beetle with flaming and protruding eyes.

And the body, legs, and every visible part of the huge insect was apparently of gleaming gold, wherein the eyes, like red and sparkling rubies, shone forth with a wonderful brightness upon the beholders.

Erminie gazed at the singular thing, and her mother, with composed voice, turned to her, saying:

"You see here, my child, the golden beetle. I show it to you first, that you may understand what I am about to tell you regarding the curse of the Fenwicks—the curse that is the cause of your father's violent death."

CHAPTER II.

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD.

ERE Mrs. Fenwick could say more, there was a ring at the front door bell.

She let fall the curtain.

"I forgot," she said. "I am expecting the undertaker, Erminie, for whom I sent. That is he, probably. I will tell you of the mysterious golden beetle some other time."

She hurriedly passed her daughter.

Erminie remained standing on the threshold, her gaze fastened upon the green curtains of the alcove.

When assured that she was alone, she stepped noiselessly forward to the curtains and drew them aside.

Instantly a thrill passed over her.

Even in the transient moment of the first glance she had had at the golden beetle, she had involuntarily marked its position.

Now, as she looked, she saw that in the lapse of the few seconds, the thing had actually moved and the arrangement of the golden legs was not as formerly!

A nameless horror seized her.

The thing of gold seemed imbued with life!

She turned and fled from the apartment.

On the landing at the staircase she heard voices below.

The undertaker with Mrs. Fenwick.

The man of coffins had entered the room, led by the mistress of the house, the other servants, besides the girl dispatched to the detective agency, being then in sound slumber in their dormitory on the highest floor.

With the undertaker were his assistants, two busy youths who were engaged at the pallet, while Mrs. Fenwick said:

"It may look like undue haste, sir, but as there can be no doubt of his death, I will feel relieved to a degree when the sad rites are over. I therefore beg that you will make haste; and insert for me the necessary notices in the papers. Mr. Fenwick was a gentleman well

known in this community and Baltimore and may have many friends that I do not know of. All, no doubt, would like to attend."

"A very sad affair, madame."

"Very sad."

Erminie listened with an inexplicable feeling.

"My mother seems very indifferent," she thought.

At this juncture there was another peal at the bell.

Mrs. Fenwick herself answered.

The comer was the girl, Plura.

"You attended to my message?"

"Yes, madam."

"You may retire, Plura."

The girl ascended the stairs to her bed, but it was doubtful, Mrs. Fenwick saw, whether she went for the purpose of sleep, for she called, lowly after her:

"I can dispense with your services to-night, Plura, and see that you confine yourself to your room until summoned."

"Yes, madam."

At the moment that the girl left the vicinity of the rear parlor, Mrs. Fenwick said to the undertaker:

"You will excuse me from being present. I cannot witness your work."

"Certainly, madame, and shall really esteem it a favor if you will leave us to ourselves for a short time."

And he added, in an undertone that even his subordinates did not overhear:

"Singular woman that. She doesn't seem to take it very hard—this bringing home of a husband dead, and nobody knowing how he was killed."

Mrs. Fenwick retired to her own private sitting room in the second story.

Not the faintest trace of a tear was there in her brilliant brown eyes.

"It is singular," she murmured aloud, "that Plura should have delivered the message and there is yet no answer to the note I sent to detective head-quarters. They are generally more punctual in Richmond than in most cities over such affairs; and I explained that there had been a man killed, by means that were in my mind foul, and not by natural causes."

"And that is precisely my opinion, madame!"

A low, sharp cry escaped the lips of Mathilde Fenwick at the interruption by an unknown and unexpected voice.

She sprang from the easy-chair into which she had cast herself and darted a frightened glance around her.

Not five feet distant stood a man whose appearance was striking.

Not above four and a half feet in height, with a strangely white face and an enormous black mustache, which, with his black and keen eyes, seemed to rivet the beholder with an idea that he was a painted object more likely than a human being.

"Who are you, sir?"

"Your humble servant."

"That means nothing. How came you to be in my rooms?"

"Take a look at me. Ha, ha! Well, I cannot exactly go through a keyhole, but I am here, and the trellis outside your window, madame, has afforded me ample means for ascending. I am here. And I wish to have a word with you, if you please. My name is Alvaro Mandez. I am the Master of the *Golden Beetle*!"

At the utterance the woman gave a cry that interrupted him.

He raised his brows. "You are startled at something, madame."

"You are mistaken. I am startled at nothing. What do you want here in my house?"

"I bring a message from the Order of the *Golden Beetle*."

"Give it me."

Instantly her composure returned.

The man handed to her a paper.

As she proceeded to tear it open and read it, his eyes, like the eyes of a serpent, were fixed upon her steadily.

The next moment she said, commandingly:

"Begone by the way you came."

"Turn your head, if you please."

"Why should I turn my head?"

"Do as I request, or I shall remain here until the arrival of the detective for whom you have sent."

She averted her head.

"At least he is right," passed in her brain.

"He does not wish that I shall be able to give any information of his comings and goings."

And she called, guardedly, after a moment:

"Are you gone, Alvaro?"

At the moment that Mrs. Fenwick thus received in a manner mysterious to herself a visitor who brought her a message, there was an unobserved figure at the landing above who looked, by leaning over the banisters, into the sitting-room.

Erminie Fenwick!

And she saw the man who had addressed her mother, when the latter had turned her head, disappear over the iron-work at the window at the further side of the room, beyond which was a thick growth of ivy.

Involuntarily into the girl's mind came the

thought that something very mysterious was transpiring within her home.

And while she looked and wondered, there came another summons at the front door.

For a third time, Mrs. Fenwick herself answered.

The comer was the detective.

"You sent for me, I believe."

"Is your name Joseph Call?"

"That is my name."

The comer had recognized immediately that the lady of the house herself had opened the door.

"Step inside, please. I want a few moments' conversation with you."

She led the way into the front parlor, where a light burned, and paused, before saying anything, to see whether the folding doors between the front and back rooms were tightly shut.

"You are a detective?"

"My name is Joseph Call, madame. I presumed, by your sending for me, that you were aware of my profession before sending. You are Mrs. Fenwick, of course?"

"I am that person. I have a case for you."

"Please state it."

"I ask that you will talk lowly, because there are other persons in the back room—the undertaker."

"The undertaker?"

"Yes, who is to prepare my husband for burial. I wanted you for the object of finding out who has killed my husband. He has been murdered, I have not the slightest doubt. You detectives can find out most everything, can you not?"

"Perhaps."

"And Jo Call asked:

"What is your husband's name, and will you please give me what points you can, madame, without my putting any further questions?"

"I will do so. My husband was brought home a short time ago—that is, this evening within the hour—dead. By papers alone which were fortunately found on his person, he was identified. I wish to find his murderers."

"You think he was murdered?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Where is the body?"

"Must you see it?"

"Yes."

"Come with me, then, and after you have viewed it, I will tell you all I can in regard to his movements. That is what you principally desire, is it not?"

She arose and started to lead the way to the rear room where the undertaker and his assistants were busy.

Jo Call was very small, both in body and head—a dwarf, if such a thing can be possible among the wonderful detectives who have been developed among the detectives of detective story romance of late years.

Hardly more than four and a half feet in height, he seemed a rather slender specimen to cope with roughs and rowdies and greater criminals; yet Jo Call had a reputation among the craft which had placed him foremost with those of the private detective agencies which had sprung up since the war in the Virginia capital.

As they passed from the front parlor to the rear, he asked:

"The name, please?"

"Fenwick. Why, I thought everybody in Richmond knew who my husband was and where he lived."

"True, madame, and pardon me. But the body."

In the rear room the intrusion of Mrs. Fenwick and her unknown visitor was looked upon as an inexcusable breaking up of the business of the undertaker and his arrangements.

But Call merely exhibited his badge and made the remark:

"You are of course aware, sir, that this corpse cannot be buried, under the circumstances, without the inquest. Please let me have a look at it for a moment. Mrs. Fenwick, will you stand aside for a moment while I take that look?"

Jo Call stepped forward to the pallet and laid his hand, the first thing, upon the back part of Dorsey Fenwick's head behind the ear.

Instantly upon doing so, he exclaimed:

"I thought so!"

"What did you think?" put Mrs. Fenwick, who stood at the door.

"The same process."

"What process?"

"The process that is and has been used by The Roughts of Richmond for a long while."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Your husband has been murdered, as you at first supposed. But there will be a doubt whether he was murdered purposely or not. He has been killed by a gang—a very formidable gang—which is known to us detectives and to the police as The Roughts of Richmond. It was originally organized by some of Imboden's outcasts—a set that every true Southerner to-day despises—and has even degenerated into worse than it was, accumulating the outcast thieves of both the Northern cities and the Southern cities, until it would be a blessing if we could only get upon the track of them."

"But is not that your business?"

"It is, madame."

"I want you to find the murderers of my husband," and she added, emphatically:

"Find for me the man or men who killed Dorsey Fenwick, and I will pay you five thousand dollars!"

Jo Call's eyes glistened.

"You make that offer, madame?"

"I do."

"Then depend upon it, he, or they, shall be found. Where was your husband—or where was he going—before this thing happened? I shall ask for no more information than that."

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTRIC PISTOL.

THE undertaker and his assistants had remained silent listeners to the conversation between Mrs. Fenwick and the detective.

She said:

"I would like to know how you were aware of my husband having been killed by a gang known, as you say, as The Roughts of Richmond. What did you discover when you were feeling of his head?"

"If you will kindly lead the way, madame, to a room where we may talk privately, I will answer your question."

She immediately turned and left the apartment, followed by Jo Call; and the undertaker resumed his task with the dead body.

In an adjoining room, and without seating herself or inviting the detective to do so, Mrs. Fenwick said:

"There can be no listeners here, sir."

"You saw me feeling the back part of your husband's head?"

"Yes."

"Since it has been discovered that there is an organized gang in the city of Richmond known by the title I have mentioned, it has also been ascertained that their victims, every one, have been assaulted in the same manner as your husband—by an electric pistol!"

"An electric pistol?"

"Yes. This weapon is a peculiar thing; one has fallen into the hands of the police authorities, but its action, or the manner of making it available, is a complete mystery. Only those who have been instructed in its use can utilize it. Enough has been learned of it, however, to show that it is something on the plan of the electric tube which is now so popular for the lighting of gas-burners; you press a thumb-piece and the discharge follows. The wound inflicted by the weapon is not such a wound as a bullet would make; a ball of fire evidently, darts from the tube, striking the victim and causing either death or insensibility. In your husband's case the result was death. The mark of the stroke is simply a raised lump upon the skin on the neck at the base of the skull, or where the spinal column joins the skull. That is all I can inform you of regarding it; but you see, I know who killed your husband—that is, I know the source, indefinitely, of his death. I shall accept your offer to hunt down the murderer. And now will you please answer a few questions?"

"Certainly," she replied, arousing from the rapt attention which she had given to his phenomenal account of the electric pistol.

"Anything that I can do to facilitate your labor in the trailing down of the murderer of Dorsey Fenwick, I will be only too glad to do."

"Where was your husband going upon his last departure from home?"

"To Manchester."

"Ah! That shows that the gang are, or have been, operating in the vicinity of the bridge," Call mused, aloud, as if to himself.

Then he asked:

"Had he any money about him?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Strange, then"—again to himself, as he looked down at the floor meditatively. "There must have been an object of deliberate murder, then. Had he any enemies?"

"I am sure, none."

"Stranger still. I think I will see the captain of police first thing. I will call upon you again, madame."

When he had gone, Mrs. Fenwick started up the stairs.

"No one knows—no one suspects. I am safe!" fell from her lips. "And the treacherous *Golden Beetle* must take the blame if anything transpires to make it necessary for me to relate my inmost knowledge of Dorsey Fenwick's affairs."

At the landing she paused to glance around.

"I thought Erminie would have waited to hear the story of the *Golden Beetle*," she murmured. "Where can the child be?"

Erminie would always be a child to this strangely beautiful mother; but no child was she.

At that very moment she was doing something which would have for some deep reason alarmed her mother.

Jo Call had not taken more than a dozen steps along the pavement when a female figure glided forward from the shadow of the gate to the garden and paused before him in the moonlight.

"I wish to speak to you," she said, in a low tone.

"Certainly, madame—or miss; what is it?"

"You are a detective?"

"I am."

"You have just been talking with my mother?"

"Your mother?"

"Mrs. Fenwick is my mother—not my own mother, for I was Dorsey Fenwick's child before he saw Mathilde Drew. I was very small when my father married her."

"Well, miss, what is it you have to say?"

"Something concerning my father's mysterious death."

"Can you give me any information that will throw light upon it?" he queried.

"I am not certain whether I can. But, there is something that I feel you ought to know; and because of that feeling I have come here to intercept you."

"Well, miss, what is it?"

"Our house is a house of mystery. Shortly before you came I saw a man in conversation with my mother, in the library, who announced himself a Master of the Golden Beetle."

"A Golden Beetle? Some order, perhaps. There is nothing so very remarkable in that your mother was conversing with this person, is there?"

"Yes—to me. For he entered the house by way of that window yonder, like a man of stealth who did not wish any one to know of his presence," and she pointed to the high window of the library, which the detective saw could be reached by a person of more than ordinary agility, by climbing the thick growth of ivy extending above and about the small railing there.

"My mother seemed to be very much startled by the intrusion of the man, but recovered herself when he announced that he came with a message from the Order of the Golden Beetle."

"Proceed, Miss Fenwick."

"There is such an insect as a golden beetle in this very house; a thing of gold that seems to be imbued with life. But I have not the time at this moment to speak more particularly of it."

Call was momentarily silent in some amazement at her declaration regarding a beetle of gold with movements of life.

Then she resumed:

"The paper the man gave to my step-mother was this," and as she spoke, she handed him a small missive, adding: "She dropped it from her bosom at the moment when she was descending the stairs to see you. Look at it."

Jo Call read the following:

"MADAME:—Your husband, a member of the Order of the Golden Beetle, has died this night. By the law of the order an investigation must be made into the causes thereof. You are requested to meet one of the order for a consultation upon the subject within twenty-four hours after receipt of this notice. That one can be found at the rooms you have visited more than once during the past few months for consultation with Arban. Do not fail."

"What do you make out of it?" Erminie asked, watching his face keenly in the moonlight.

"Well, really, nothing at the present moment. But it may lead to something; you know we detectives catch at everything, great and small, when following up a mystery. I shall keep it—the note, if you have no objection."

"You may keep it. But I have something else to say."

"Well?"

"My step-mother is a very singular woman."

"In what way?"

"Would it not be natural that if she loved my father, she would give some sign of sorrow at this awful occurrence?"

"Quite natural."

"She has not done so. I have not seen the trace of a single tear in her face; she has been as calm as ice itself. A terrible suspicion has come into my mind—coupling all that I have seen together; the lack of emotion upon beholding the dead body of my father, the coming of the mysterious man, the handing of the note and its effect, and above all the contents of that note."

"What have you inferred from the note?"

"That this Order of the Golden Beetle, whatever it may be, suspects that my mother may know more than she would be willing to tell regarding the death of my father."

"That is indeed a terrible suspicion, Miss Fenwick."

"I cannot eradicate it from my mind. Yes, I suspect my step mother."

"What do you wish me to do in the matter, more than what your mother has already requested?"

"What has she requested?"

"That I find the murderer of her husband. She has offered a reward of five thousand dollars for his apprehension."

Erminie was silent for a few seconds.

"I possess some wealth in my own name that others cannot touch," she said, presently. "I will double the reward if you are successful."

"With such an incentive, I have no doubt that it can be accomplished."

"You feel confident that you can find him?"

"Yes, the murderer of Dorsey Fenwick shall be found—Ha!"

The last quick exclamation burst from his lips in mingled startlement and pain, for at the instant that portion of the garden in which they were standing seemed to be illuminated by a limited flash of lightning.

Erminie saw something like a streak of fire pass directly between herself and the detective.

Jo Call reeled backward a step, and sunk to the sword.

Involuntarily she knelt and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What is it? Are you hurt?" she asked, suppressedly.

Call did not reply at once, but after a few moments of silence, said:

"That was close. But I do not think I am quite a dead man yet," and he began slowly and dazedly to regain his feet.

The next instant he darted abruptly away from her side, on a run, toward a certain clump of bushes not far distant.

Erminie heard him tramping hurriedly hither and thither among the shrubbery.

He returned after the lapse of not more than two minutes, saying:

"The murderous rascal escaped through the gate on nimble feet, Miss Fenwick, while I lay there half-insensible."

"Who do you mean?"

"The one who fired the shot."

"There was no shot, sir."

"Oh, yes, there was."

"But I could make oath that there was no report."

"Of course not. The electric pistol does not make a bang like any other pistol."

"The electric pistol?"

"Yes. Such a weapon it was that killed your father. The same was used upon me, just now, after I had declared my intention to find the murderer of Dorsey Fenwick. And now I do solemnly swear that I will accomplish that very thing, or lose my life in the attempt. We cannot afford to have such a gang in existence in Richmond. There has never until to-night been a sufficient inducement for the force to push the rascals to their utmost. But you will find that the reward of ten thousand dollars will fetch them up with a short turn. I bid you good-night."

Jo Call hurried from the garden and away toward his office on Capitol Square.

His partner, Timothy Tuff, was seated there when he entered.

"Tim, a word with you, in a hurry."

The two retired to a rear room.

"I have been assaulted to-night by the gang that uses the electric pistol," he said.

"You?"

"Yes. Look," and he turned his head, exhibiting on the part of the neck at the junction with the skull, a small, round, raised mark, seemingly nothing but a lump.

"The very mark, by Jove!"

"I've started a case to-night, Tim, and we must work it together. I have a point or two to commence on. Listen."

Call then proceeded to relate what had transpired at the Fenwick mansion. He explained, also, a suspicion that had entered his mind based on the remarks from Erminie.

In less than ten minutes after entering the agency, Call had laid out a plan of action in which the two noted sleuths could play a cunning, bold and dangerous game in concert.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTIC CHAMBER OF THE GOLDEN BEETLE. THERE was crape on the door of the Fenwick mansion on the following day.

The house of the wealthy family was an object of vast curiosity; for the *Dispatch* had contained an account of the dastardly and mysterious killing of one of Richmond's most respected citizens.

This curiosity and wonder, were rather heightened when, at about the hour of noon—the sleepest hour for that southern city—the private carriage of Mrs. Fenwick was noticed to come around from the stables at the rear and pause by the curb at the corner, in waiting for some one.

The driver was dressed in complete black, and on his high hat was a heavy bandage of crape.

Soon a lady, attired in deepest mourning, came forth from the house and entered the carriage; so thick was her veil, however, that it was impossible to distinguish who she might be.

The driver started his horses away briskly, after a whispered instruction from the lady.

At the same time a face which had been fixed against an upper window, in a house opposite the Fenwick mansion, disappeared, and its owner came swiftly forth, following in the wake of the receding carriage.

At the corner the man entered a vehicle something like a doctor's gig, which was held in evident readiness there by a negro.

Steadily after the carriage went this medical-looking gentleman in his physician's gig, and beneath a bunch of thick whiskers he muttered:

"Didn't have long to wait, it seems. You are going, I think, Mrs. Fenwick, to meet this member of the Order of the Golden Beetle, whatever it means. *I'll be there.*"

At the corner of Fourteenth and Main streets the carriage halted long enough for the veiled figure to alight, then drove off down the incline.

The lady turned down the side-street and entered a house having a narrow door, whose windows were closed, and the whole aspect of which was rather uninviting.

In answer to a tinkling bell a small Indian boy appeared.

Pausing in the artificially-lighted entry, she demanded:

"Is your master in? I wish to see him."

"Did you come, lady, to ask about the Golden Beetle?"

"Yes."

"Then my master will see you. Come."

He led the way up the stairs.

Hardly had they turned the landing above when the front door silently reopened to admit the man in medical garb, who advanced boldly, but in utter silence, as if his shoe-soles were of rubber, so lightly did they fall on the uncarpeted hallway.

At a door in the second story, over the top of which was one of those peculiarly tilted mirrors which give the upper occupant a complete view of the stairs, the Indian boy paused and rapped, when the door swung open, as if by an invisible touch.

"Enter," ordered the youthful guide.

Into a luxurious room she stepped, where the furnishings were of an oriental richness.

In the center of the room, facing the door, was a remarkable man.

He was attired in a long gown of white, his head surmounted by a hat made in the shape of a cornucopia, and beneath the pointed head-covering was a face that looked more like the face of a ghoul or a corpse than that of a human being—a face covered by a mask of tightly-fitting, skin-like material, white as death, and from the eyelets of which gleamed two eyes like the orbs of a snake, twinkling, burning, brilliant and saturnine by turns.

Before the woman could speak, this singular being raised his hand in a warning manner and said, addressing the boy in a language which the visitor could not understand:

"Ischan! where are your eyes, that you cannot see?—your ears, that you cannot hear? Look; there is another behind you!"

The glance of the boy followed the directing finger of the master, falling upon the mirror over the door.

He saw there the form of a man ascending the stairs below.

"I did not admit him, master."

"Then he is an intruder. I shall make him await my leisure. Prepare the trap."

The boy vanished, going to a small, closet-like apartment at the front of the hall.

The door, by its invisible machinery, closed behind the woman, and the master of the mysterious apartments turned his attention now to her.

"Remove your veil!" he commanded, in a tone of courteous authority.

"Arban, why have you sent for me?" she asked, obeying his command by sweeping aside her veil and revealing the pale face of Mathilde Fenwick.

"Who said I had sent for you?"

"The note brought by a member of the order to which my husband belonged."

"The note did not say so. You have no knowledge that I am even a member of the Order of the Golden Beetle. But I have some instructions regarding you. It is well that you obeyed the summons served upon you."

"And if I had not obeyed?"

"The Golden Beetle would have struck at you in your own home. As it is, you may have some chance."

"Chance! What do you mean?"

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

Just then there was a singular noise that came dully to their ears as they stood there within the room.

"What is that?"

"You cannot guess?"

"How should I?"

"Did you not know that you were followed here? Or, was that man brought here by you to spy upon our interview?"

"I do not know who or what you are talking about."

"If that is the truth then you have been shadowed."

"Shadowed?"

Even this wealthy lady seemed to have some knowledge of the meaning of a phrase familiar to the detectives; her beautiful face grew a shade paler.

"Why should I be shadowed?"

"Perhaps you are suspected already by the authorities, even as you are suspected by the members of the Order of the Golden Beetle," was the ominous response.

"Suspected! How!—what do you mean? Of what?"

"That you will learn when I shall take you

before the tribunal. Come, it is now awaiting your presence."

"Arban—what does all this mean? Of what am I suspected?"

"You shall soon know. Come, madame!"

He advanced and laid a firm but gentle grasp on her arm.

The touch, with that hideous face so close to hers, filled her with a horror so intense that her face seemed to lose its loveliness in the drawn, pinched look of abhorrence that was forced into it.

"Take your hand off, Arban. Where am I to go? This is all very mysterious to me."

"The Order of the Golden Beetle is a mysterious order, madame. I am intrusted with the task of leading you to them. For your own good, I warn you not to disregard its summons," and he added, significantly:

"You are not afraid to be in the presence of an order to which your husband was deeply attached?"

"Afraid? Why should I be afraid? No; lead the way. But I beg of you not to touch me again."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the man. "Come, then."

He stalked to a side where there were heavy curtains. Raising these, he revealed a flight of steps set in the wall and lighted by oil lamps at intervals.

It was stilly and suggestive of the entrance to an underground tomb, though, instead of odors as if from the dead, there ascended, upon the raising of the curtains, a most delicious perfume that seemed to enter the woman's brain instantly like the insinuating intoxication of a drug.

"Come!" and he pointed downward, his eyes at the same time fixed peculiarly upon her from the eyelets of the mask.

She obeyed with timorous steps.

Behind her followed the masked and mysterious master of that mysterious habitation.

Suddenly, upon reaching the bottom of the flight, every light that had served as a guide was extinguished, and the woman stood in absolute darkness.

A dread chill struck into her every fiber. She reached outward gropingly; but her lips seemed as if paralyzed, for she could not utter a sound.

Again the touch of Arban fell upon her arm.

"Be not alarmed—not yet, at least. I will guide you. It is necessary that we should enter the temple through this darkness."

She offered no resistance to his grasping hand, this time.

He led her forward along what she knew must be a very narrow corridor between solid masonry.

Then—

She could not realize in what manner exactly it transpired; but ere she knew it, she found herself thrust into a light so intensely brilliant that she was nearly blinded.

When she recovered her vision, she was awed by what she saw.

She stood in the very center of an apartment that was the most wonderful she had ever beheld.

No fairy and scenic display of the theater-stage had equaled this sight in novelty nor surpassed it in grandeur.

Like the very grottoes of Aladdin or the palaces of sea-nymphs did it appear to be, in tinsel, painting, reflective light that brought out the gleam of apparent gems and streaks of golden beauties amid colorings that the eye could not attempt to trace without being completely dazzled.

Directly in front of her was a rock in miniature, on the peak of which was a monstrous golden beetle, fully the size of a human in life, its surface of gold seeming to fairly burn in the rays that dwelt upon it, and its eyes—like the eyes of the one we have seen in the library of the Fenwick mansion—red as rubies, with all the grandeur of the royal gems and larger than hens' eggs.

In lines extended forward from the mystic rock, on each side, were figures of human beings attired in white gowns, the same as that worn by Arban—six on one side, five on the other.

While she stood and gazed on the wonderful sight, on the colors, the beetle, the glistening gems and profusion of nameless richness on every side, Arban passed her and advanced with solemn tread to the rear of the beetle rock.

Ascending a step here, he removed his ghastly mask.

Those assembled around, as if in obedience to a signal, instead of removing masks similarly ghastly, which they wore, bowed their heads in token of respect to the unmasking of the Master of the Order of the Golden Beetle.

And the face revealed was the face of the man who had called himself Alvaro Mandez, when he delivered the mysterious summons to Mrs. Fenwick at her home on the previous evening.

Simultaneously with the removal of the chief's mask, the monstrous beetle swung round, as on a pivot, and seemed to fasten its jeweled eyes squarely upon the trembling woman who stood before the altar rock.

"Mathilde Fenwick," spoke the master, regarding her intently, "compose yourself, for we are about to ask you a question that much depends upon. We shall expect a truthful answer."

"What is it?" she managed to respond, though her lips seemed to her to be gluing together despite her strongest effort.

"Do you know who killed Dorsey Fenwick?"

"I do not."

"You will swear to that?"

"I will."

"Then, if you can satisfy us that you are innocent of his death, you will become mistress of our order."

"Mistress of your order?"

"Yea—yea!" arose from the throats of those around, sepulchrally.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAP THAT DID NOT CATCH.

"It has pleased Providence to snatch from our midst the most able worker the order has ever had in the person of Dorsey Fenwick," the master said, with utmost gravity. "And we have reason to believe that in his wife we shall find another who may at least equal if not surpass him in the capability of doing what Dorsey Fenwick did to increase the wealth of the wealthiest order that has ever been formed in the United States. Cast your eyes about you and you will perceive that everything is of virgin gold; there is no sham within the temple of the Golden Beetle. And the pockets of those who serve the beetle well are lined in a similar manner—with the great lever that can move a world of humanity. Gold! Everything is gold. Beneath the floor on which you stand there is a mine to enrich the faithful servants of the order as rapidly as is consonant with their labors. There are reasons why it is known to us that you can serve us well."

"I—serve you?" exclaimed the astonished woman, now beginning to feel less overawed by her surroundings, at what she considered a most assuring speech.

"We generally know whom to address and whom to trust. You are a woman of remarkable shrewdness and gifted for plotting, Mathilde Fenwick."

"You are complimentary or ironical, I don't know which."

"We shall decide that. You came of a very obscure parentage, madame, and you married Dorsey Fenwick for his wealth. That wealth deserted him, on wings, long ago. It was then he had recourse to this order, and since has accumulated more than even you imagine—withal your cleverness in appropriating to yourself, through various questionable means, so much of it. It was because we knew you were robbing your own husband that we decided you to be a woman of some nerve and ingenuity. I can show you how to gratify your desire for wealth, if you are ready to take such an oath as we shall require."

"And if I do not so decide?"

"Then you will never again see the light of day. It is a rule that no one who has ever entered this chamber can go out from it alive, except as a sworn member of the band. You will please make your selection," he said, in the calmest voice possible.

"Between death, and life with riches?"

"That is the combination of alternatives."

"I prefer to live, I assure you," and now she spoke with a calmness as even as that observed by this strange master of an order as strange.

He raised his hand, with two fingers extended.

Two of the white-robed beings stepped forward, each grasping one of the woman's arms.

A procession was formed.

Alvaro Mandez gained a position ahead of them and touched a spring in the floor.

One of the massive slabs moved aside on some mechanical contrivance, revealing a flight of stone steps that led to still another and deeper underground apartment.

Down this flight all filed.

Mathilde Fenwick found herself introduced into a room that was like a workshop, the principal implements of which were small lathes of the most delicate and highly-finished steel and fine plating.

And as her glance roved around, she saw what appeared to be a little heap of gold-dust on carefully adjusted oiled papers beneath each lathe as if the workmen who might have been recently working there had been engaged in turning upon bars or pieces of solid gold.

"You behold here the great mine of the Golden Beetle," said Mandez, seeming to enjoy the look of astonishment that came over her face. "The toilers here are, everyone, millionaires. It is the offer to share in this mysterious wealth that is now made to you."

The light in Mathilde Fenwick's eyes was that of one who is at first dazzled and then grown feverish by the sight of so much gold—the emotion enhanced by the hint that she can be admitted to share.

"What am I to do? Speak—tell me!" burst from her.

"You are ready to take the oath which shall make you our queen?"

"Yes."

"Forward to the bar of initiation," ordered Mandez.

Again the line of procession was taken up. They crossed the mysterious workshop and passed through a niche that was concealed by heavy draping curtains.

And as they disappeared beyond, a man's face was thrust over the edge of the slab at the top of the short flight of steps, gazing after them curiously—the face of the man who had entered the building in shadowing the movements of Mathilde Fenwick!

He had had a thrilling experience in the brief interval from the time of his entering the house to the moment when we see him thus spying upon the movements of the mystic order.

In prompt obedience to the order in a strange tongue delivered by the white-masked leader or master, the Indian boy had stepped spryly away toward a room at the front of the hall.

Here he pulled on a wire that protruded, with a button-like termination, from a certain point in the wall of the bare room.

Then he coolly waited for developments, which quickly came.

Something like a confined and sliding crash occurred in the stairway near the upper landing.

The medical-looking personage who was, as he imagined, successfully following the movements of Mathilde Fenwick, suddenly found himself precipitated in a singular manner downward.

The flooring gave entirely away from beneath his feet.

But it was not an ordinary trap upon which he had stepped.

Instead of falling actually downward, it had a sort of lateral motion, which hurled him from his feet at the same time he found himself sinking.

Into a boarded and slanting slide—like a flue or shoot—he went tumbling helplessly, gliding along and down without the slightest power to resist the impetus.

Then he fell inside a darkened chamber, but, like a monkey, or with the agility of a cat, he struck on his feet, and the distance of the fall was apparently not great, for, with the exception of the unusual jar, he was not injured at all.

Black as chaos itself was his surrounding.

"Trapped, by Jingo!" burst from him in an undertone.

And the voice was that of the detective, Jo Call.

Instantly he began groping about his sudden place of imprisonment, though he realized that he had been purposely hurled there, and his wily captors would not likely cast him into a place from which escape was easy—their object being evidently to entrap him.

While he was feeling here and there against the walls, with an almost desperate hope that something might occur to give him some hope of release, he caught a ratchety sound at one side, like the scratching of a claw.

Then a faint streak of light shone into his place of captivity and a secret door opened.

First, an inquiring face was thrust into the place—the face of the Indian boy!

What he saw seemed to assure him that it was safe for him to enter.

The detective had thrown himself flat upon the floor, in such a position that it would appear as if he was completely stunned by his recent fall.

"He has had a bad fall," muttered the Indian lad, advancing and waving the lamp above the head of the man. "And now I will fix the poison incense, so that ere he can recover from this state, I can say to my master: 'He is dead.' I know that my master wishes every one to be dead who comes into the house as this man did."

At one side was a shelf.

Going to this, Ischan placed thereon the lamp he had brought and at the same time arranged over the top of its chimney a contrivance like a plate that could receive the heat of the flame without destroying the draught of the burner.

Immediately a small, curling line of smoke began to ascend toward the ceiling and spread a strange perfume throughout the apartment.

Ischan turned to depart hurriedly, lest he should himself breathe some of the poisonous smoke; but he was arrested in a startling manner.

"Halt, you young rascal."

Standing between himself and the door was the man he had thought to be unconscious.

And the detective had him covered with a revolver, while he said, sternly:

"Do you wish to die?"

"Mercy!" cried the lad, with frightened voice, and sinking upon his knees abjectly.

"You mean to kill me by that poisonous smoke ascending there?"

"Mercy!"

"If I spare your life, will you lead me out of this?"

"Yes, yes!" and Ischan added, as he rolled his eyes fearfully toward the thickening smoke: "for the love of Heaven, sir, hasten out of here, and let me begone, or we shall both be killed."

"Come, then, and, mark you! no tricks, or I shall blow the whole top of your head off." Gripping the boy by one arm, he forced him from the place and drew shut the door—an iron door set strongly in the masonry.

The door shut with a light click, and Jo Call observed that it was so arranged that it could only be opened from the side on which they now stood.

A narrow landing-place, scarcely two feet square, down from which led into impenetrable darkness beyond the ray of a dull lamp on a bracket at one side, a flight of very narrow stairs of heavy joisting.

The boy hesitated and seemed to be greatly distressed.

"I shall be murdered for this," he whispered, trembling.

"For what?"

"Liberating you."

"And you will assuredly be murdered if you do not keep on and lead me to a place of safety outside of this infernal abode of dark traps. Do you comprehend that I am in earnest?" and he pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver close to the boy's temple as he uttered the words.

"Do not kill me!"

"Will you lead me out?"

There was another hesitation.

"Come, my lad, I have no wish to kill any one, but it is evidently your life or mine, and I certainly shall not hesitate to blow your brains out if you hesitate much longer."

"Then I shall be killed, anyhow."

"What do you mean?"

"There is but one way from the spot on which we stand."

"Well?"

"Through the council chamber of the Order of the Golden Beetle—we must go through that."

"You came that way?"

"No. Look," pointing upward.

Casting a quick glance upward—not long enough to permit of any trick on the part of the boy—Call saw that there was an opening overhead, through which the boy had evidently dropped to gain an entrance into the pitfall.

"How did you expect to get back, then—if it is so dangerous to pass through the council-chamber of this Order of the Golden Beetle of which you speak?"

"Oh, I am a member."

"You are a member, eh? Then I guess you can safely conduct me through the place. Forward, now! Do not hesitate any longer or—" and again he pressed close the muzzle of the weapon.

"Tread carefully, then," warned Ischan. "I am risking my life to save it. If we are caught together we are both as good as dead. Tread carefully, I beseech you."

With one hand gripping the boy's shoulder, Jo Call was led slowly down the steps into the terrible darkness beyond.

Going a short distance along a level, Ischan paused and said:

"Wait; I will take a glance. Don't you hear footsteps? The members are moving. Perhaps I can get you out without discovery."

He pulled aside a draping of curtains ahead, and the detective had a glimpse of that wonderful subterranean chamber which had so dazzled Mathilde Fenwick on her first entrance into it.

It was at the moment when the last of the spectrally-garbed band was descending through the massive trap in the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

"NOW FOR THE ROUGHS OF RICHMOND!"

ISCHAN, when he saw that the chamber was empty, made a movement forward, the detective still retaining a gripe on his arm.

They crossed the flagged floor to the curtains on the opposite side, where was the entrance by which Mathilde Fenwick had been admitted.

"Wait," said Call, having ascertained that here was an outlet.

"What would you do?" asked Ischan.

"I have a notion that I would like to see what is going on down there," pointing to the slab that had been moved aside to admit the descending and mystic band.

"Do not pause," the boy urged, anxiously. "If we are caught—you and I together—they will kill us."

"Obey me!" was all the detective vouchsafed; and not for an instant removing his gripe from the lad, he stepped quickly back to the aperture, stooping and glancing downward.

He had only time to gain a glimpse of the mysterious workshop that was so far underground in this strange abode, when he was reminded that it was no child's play to attempt to pry into the secrets of an order like this.

With a quickness that was astonishing, Ischan inserted his finger in the trigger of the revolver which the detective held.

By a quick pull, the weapon exploded, sending the ball glancing down on the stone flooring below.

"You may kill me!" he cried; "but now, if you do, your own death is certain. I am will-

ing to give you your life, but you must follow me before seeing any more. I cannot betray the order, so binding is my oath. Come; in one minute more you will be surrounded by those who will kill you without asking a single question."

Jo Call could not avoid an exclamation of admiration for the boy's pluck in thus exposing himself to instant death at the hands of an enemy of the order sooner than betray the secrets of that order.

Ischan, to save his life, was willing to conduct this interloper to safety beyond the house; but not to save his life would he let that interloper into the secrets of the Order of the Golden Beetle.

The effect of the unexpected shot was instantly discernible.

Below, Mandez grasped the wrist of the woman who was about to be initiated by a mystic rite.

The rest, in concert, turned and dashed toward the flight of stone steps leading upward from the underground apartment.

"Come—come, if you value your life!" urged Ischan.

Jo Call realized his danger fully.

He sprang from the position into which he had settled himself to spy upon the proceedings below, and started on a run after the boy, who, though no longer menaced by the revolver, seemed as anxious as the detective himself to have the latter out of the council-chamber of the Golden Beetle.

Through the curtains they dashed and up the stairs leading to the reception chamber.

Here Ischan said:

"Give me your weapon. I will say that I was examining it and it exploded in my hand."

"And the moment I do that, you will undertake to make a prisoner of me," the detective assumed, adding:

"Oh, no, I guess I am not quite so green as that."

"If you do not give me the weapon, I cannot make any excuse for that shot; nothing that I may say will be believed. They may inflict a terrible punishment, a torture upon me, to find out what it really meant. I swear to you that I will not trick you."

There could be no doubting the boy's sincerity.

"Take it, then. But mind, if you attempt anything tricky, I have another here, and I shall not hesitate to use it."

"Go—go!" urged the boy, who was trembling.

The detective started out by the door the boy indicated, knowing that he could not hope to gather any more information regarding Mathilde Fenwick at that time without great jeopardy to himself.

In the hall he continued his retreat.

Within five minutes after leaving the second floor room in that mysterious house, he was standing on Main street a little perplexed for the moment with all that had transpired.

He had heard, though, in that brief moment when he looked down upon the white-robed figures with the woman in their midst, the words which indicated that they wished her to become their queen.

He had seen the piles of gold, the lathes, and enough to convince him that this Order of the Golden Beetle was no common order, and by some means, the object—an object fully obtained—was the accumulation of money.

"Where have you been?"

The voice broke in on his cogitations suddenly, and a touch fell upon his arm.

The speaker was his partner, Timothy Tuff.

Both detectives were in disguise, but they knew one another well.

"I have something to tell you, Tim. I have had an adventure in following up the woman, Mathilde Fenwick."

"You have been following her, then?"

"Yes."

"I knew she was not at home."

"How did you know?"

"Because I have been there."

"Ah!"

"Yes. I was in the house as one of the undertaker's assistants. I, too, have made a queer discovery."

"What like?"

"I have seen a golden beetle."

"Where?"

"In the library of the mansion. More—it is a very remarkable thing."

"In what way?"

"I will give you a description of it."

He related to his partner the presence of the strange thing on the table in the alcove—the table of black marble with gilded trimmings.

"More than all that—" he said, in conclusion, and pausing.

"Well?"

"The thing is endowed with life."

"Pshaw!"

"Laugh if you will. I tell you I distinctly saw it move!"

"I have just come from the council-chamber of the order that is called the Order of the Golden Beetle," said Call.

"No!"

It was Tuff's turn now to be surprised by the relation of the adventure that had befallen his partner.

"What do you think of Mrs. Fenwick?" Call asked, when he had concluded.

"I think as I told you I thought last night, after you had told me what transpired between you and the young lady, Erminie Fenwick."

"That the woman needs watching?"

"Exactly."

"And that is my intention—to watch her closely. Return to the house, Tuff, in the disguise you say you have been assuming there. But do not forget our arrangement for to-night."

"I shall not. And do not you forget. It is a mighty risky game you and I intend to play, Jo, and if you should fail to be there it may cost me my life."

"I will be at the trestle of the bridge in sight and in a position to render assistance in bagging the party who may attempt to enter the trap we have laid."

The two separated.

Tuff returned to the Fenwick mansion.

Jo Call sought the agency on Capitol Square, where he found one of the detective-police waiting there for an interview with him.

"Jo Call, I want a word with you."

"All right. Step this way."

He knew that the visit meant business of some kind.

In the rear room the officer produced a twenty-dollar gold-piece from his pocket.

"Look at that, please."

"Well?"

The detective examined the piece critically.

"Do you observe anything?"

"No."

"Look at the outer edge—"

"Ah!"

"You see it now?"

"Yes."

"The piece has been lathed out and then filled and colored."

"But it is a magnificent job."

"Very true. And goodness knows how many of them are at this moment in circulation, both in Richmond and north of it. The first intimation came from Baltimore that there were recently a number of just such pieces discovered and their current was watched for some time before anything being said about it. They are coming north, said the Baltimore officials, from the vicinity of Richmond."

"And you have been put on the thing to hunt it down, eh?"

"That's it. And what in the world to do first is a question."

"I think I can aid you."

"You speak confidently."

"I am warranted in doing so."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Not at present, my dear friend. But I think I can aid you materially in your field of inquiry. Let me give you a pointer."

"I shall be glad if you will."

"Have an eye on a lady known as Mrs. Fenwick."

"What—of Monroe Park?"

"The same."

"Surely," in hugest surprise, "there cannot be anything crooked with that family?"

"I have not said so positively, have I? Nor do I include the family, for she has a daughter who is, I am sure, the personification of purity and guilelessness. I only say I give you a pointer, and that is: watch Mrs. Fenwick. When you have done that thing pretty well, I would be glad to know what you have learned. And now if you will excuse me, I will be much obliged, as I have some important arrangements to make for a little job on hand to-night."

A very much astonished individual was the police detective when he went out from the office of Call & Tuff.

For a few seconds Call remained standing in the center of his little back office, and there was a grim look on his face.

"If I haven't got hold of a pretty big rat by the tail, then I'm greatly mistaken!" he exclaimed. "I see—or I believe I see. Hardly am I safely out of the mysterious house of Arban, where I saw a remarkable underground workshop, when here occurs something which seems to point to that workshop as the source of lathed and refilled gold-pieces. My information may prove quite a mare's nest to Bob Boswick. But I cannot follow up the trail I set him on myself just at present. I am satisfied that Miss Erminie's suspicion regarding her mother is a foolish one; Mrs. Fenwick knows nothing about the death of her husband, though she is evidently engaged at something wonderfully dangerous in connection with the Order of the Golden Beetle. Let Bob Boswick follow that pointer, while I get after the roughs who killed Mr. Dorsey Fenwick— Well?"

The office clerk had entered.

"I knew you were alone," he said. "And here's a note for you that just came."

Delivering the missive, he departed.

Jo Call opened the envelope and read this:

"Nothing to be learned at the mansion. I am now going to start up our little bait. Do not fail."

"Ah! from Tim. He's off. Now, then, for *The Roughs of Richmond!*"

The detective entered a small closet at one side.

At the expiration of a few seconds he emerged in a completely altered attire and general appearance so changed that it would have been difficult for his most intimate friends to penetrate the masquerade.

A thorough specimen of an habitual tippler, in black and seedy garments and wearing a high hat that had evidently been stood upon or kicked about in many a spree.

Leaving the agency by a rear egress, he reeled off toward Virginia street, at once assuming his role to perfection.

CHAPTER VII.

WEALTHY ERASTUS DE BINBOW.

THE train had just arrived from West Point. In the immediate surrounding of the Richmond and Danville depot there was considerable bustle.

Parties were boarding for Manchester; the throng from the cars, after a dusty ride, was hastening upward from the roaring waters of the James, into the city hazy with heat in the late hour of the afternoon.

Foremost and prominent by his peculiar appearance, was a gentleman who was evidently a stranger.

His hat was high and stiff; his coat, of blue, with brass buttons, flapped its tails like the wings of a swallow around his hinder parts.

From the front of his figured white vest hung an enormous gold chain with a monstrous seal attached; above the vest his stiff collar and showy necktie seemed to hold his head on high with the carriage of a nabob.

He glanced hither and thither.

In one hand he carried a massive, gold-headed cane; in the other a small sachel with gleaming buckles of nickel-plate.

He seemed rather to enjoy the prominence he was occasioning for himself, not attempting to avoid the jostling of those in a greater hurry than himself.

"Carriage, sir—carriage?"

A line of whips protruded in his face at the little gate on the sun-hot flags.

A chorus of newsboy yells greeted him; he half paused, glancing around upon all with a benign smile.

"No, I don't want any carriage, and I don't want any papers. But it's the dustiest and driest ride I've had for a time, I tell you. Hey, you, where can a man get a glass of cold beer to wet his thirsty throat with?"

"How much will you give to know, mister?"

"What! Am I in Lunnion once more, where a man has to pay a shillin' for asking the time o' day? Get out, Rag-tag!"

"Hi!" shouted a bootblack, with a broad grin.

"What's the matter with you, Bob-tail?"

"Hi!" from another portion of the crowd of boys.

"Dat yar man gwine to de co'vention!" piped a negro lad.

The cabmen and some of the recent travelers were laughing and half pausing, the latter, to see what the cause of the merriment was at the gate.

This "cause" now elevated his nose on high with a contemptuous sniff and proceeded along Virginia street.

"That's a nice way to receive a gentleman in a strange city!" he exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by two men who stood beside the cooper-shop watching him furtively.

"Kin I help yer any?" interrogated one of these, as he came abreast.

"Where can I get a drink—that's what I want to know," he answered, somewhat pompously; adding: "If you will show me the tavern—cause I don't see any round here—I'll set 'em up."

"Come on, then," said the first man, with a sly wink to his companion.

The pair fell in alongside.

And then it appeared for the first to strike this stranger in Richmond that his company was not attired in consonance with the class of society to which he felt he himself belonged.

"My name's Erastus de Binbow," he announced, with a flourish and a scrape of his throat. "Who are you two?—citizens of this hot town, eh?"

"My name's Sam York."

"Mine's Sam Lancaster."

"Englishmen, by ye gods!" exclaimed De Binbow, with a cheerful smile.

"Yes, we're coopers out o' work. We was just a-standin' where you saw us at a waitin'-fur a job."

De Binbow did not appear to notice the fact that if his two companions were Englishmen, they certainly had acquired wonderfully the peculiar Southern dialect—one that seems to have dropped into the untutored negro's style of expression rather than educating the negro to adopt the white man's more correct speech.

"I'm glad to come across a couple of Englishmen," said Erastus. "And maybe I can assist you, if you are out of work, as you say. And I'll do it," slapping them simultaneously on their

backs, familiarly. "I'm somebody, I tell you. You'll hear from me soon; wait till the Chicago Convention is over—Ah!" and he closed one eye with a knowing expression. "Money? Why, bless you, I swim in it. But I say—how much further to that grog-shop?"

"Not far," coarsely laughed one.

They conducted him to a saloon on Fourteenth street, reached after traversing the busy thoroughfare of the warehouses.

A bright and cheerful looking place, in which Erastus seemed to instantly feel himself at home.

Mopping his brow with a great colored handkerchief, he advanced and pompously ordered:

"Three beers! Ice cold! Double quick—for me and my friends here—Ah!" and he grasped the first that was set upon the counter, carrying it to his mouth with a rapidity that indicated his thirst could hardly be a sham.

The two men—the two Sams—exchanged glances again.

"Fill 'em up. More!" called Erastus, quickly swallowing his.

And when he made away with the second glass, he wiped his lips in apparent good humor with himself and the world in general.

"That's fine beer—" he began to say.

But the proprietor's voice just then shouted to one:

"Go on, now—git! Clear out of here!"

Erastus and his quondam acquaintances turned to see what was the matter behind them.

Into the bar had come reeling a dilapidated specimen of what once might have been a respectable man.

That respectability had evidently departed long ago.

He was then the picture of a whisky wreck.

With one hand on the swinging door, he paused at the order to make himself scarce, and his glance roved around the room to see if someone there would not take pity on his want-liquor, evidently—and call to him to remain.

"Get out!" cried the barkeeper, a second time.

"Hold on—hold on."

It was Erastus de Binbow who interrupted the scene.

The impecunious and battered bumner had struck the place at an opportune moment.

Erastus was feeling very good-natured after his copious imbibing, and was on the point of ordering more of the beaded tippie when the entrance of the bumner transpired.

"Hold on," he said. "Give the fellow something. I'll pay for it. I've got plenty of money—and nothing to do with it. I'll treat the poor fellow. Come, my wretched friend, and take something."

The barkeeper would have demurred to the presentation of such a specimen of humanity at his counter; but one of the pseudo-coopers gave that personage a wink that meant volumes.

A man with his pockets full of money, a man so green, a man like the aforesaid Erastus de Binbow, in short, ought to be humored to a degree—so said the talismanic wink.

The bumner staggered to the counter, at the same time extending a dirty palm toward his new-found friend.

"Me noble lord, hi 'onor you. You hare a Englishman, hevery hinch o' you—shake!" and the dirty hand reached and grasped the hand of Erastus, over whose countenance beamed another of those worldly happy smiles.

"Say, don't you believe any such stuff," warned the barkeeper. "He's a-shoutin' taffy at you by the jugful."

"Believe what stuff?"

"Why, that he's an Englishman."

"Oh, I can tell that he is by his speech, my friend. But no matter. Give us some more beer—fill 'em up—up high. Then I'll be on the move for the hotel."

"What hotel do yer want?" asked one of the Sams.

"Exchange."

"Then we kin show it to yer—can't we, Sam?" to the other.

"Why, hof course we kin," drawled the man. Broad was the smile on the face of Erastus, as he proceeded to drain his third glass.

And he remarked to the barkeeper:

"You see, when a true Englishman strikes a strange city, a kind Providence always pilots him to those of his own nationality. But, ah! it has been many years since I was in England; so long has it been that I have forgotten my own mother tongue—that is, I have forgotten that sweet style of talk which just now showed me that here, in this poor fellow—laying his hand patronizingly on the shoulder of the tramp—"I saw one of my own countrymen in distress. Drink, my friend—drink all you want"—as he noticed that the bumner held on fast to the bottle and glass that had been given him, notwithstanding the barkeeper had reached for it twice.

"Hi 'onor you, hi 'onor you, hi do," almost sobbed the bumner, filling his glass again.

It was observed that although Erastus de Binbow had been a very loud and thirsty individual, his capacity was not very great; for by the time he had swallowed his fourth glass of beer he was slightly tipsy.

"I reckon I'll be getting up-town to the

hotel," he said, a little thickly, while there came over his face an expression something like that which, in the drinking man, indicates a sort of half-and-half between sickness and intoxication.

"Take another beer," suggested one of the Sams, producing a silver quarter, for which he had been hunting in the deep corner of his pants pocket for some time.

"Yes, of course—another, landlord."

"Hi 'onor you, hi 'onor you," sobbed the bumner, who had begun to attract attention by his capacity for storing away the contents of a whisky bottle.

The bottle was then nearly empty, and still he clung to it.

"Let me pay the bill," protested De Binbow, when he had taken two more beers with his companions.

He opened his sachel and displayed a mass of greenbacks.

The eyes of York and Lancaster fixed upon the moneyed contents with a hungry expression which they could only conceal by averting their heads.

"And now, my friends, if you'll call a hack and direct the driver to the Exchange," said Erastus, moving unsteadily toward a chair, into which he threw himself, "I'll pay that bill too, and be much obliged to you."

York hastened from the saloon, pausing, however, to give his companion another of those winks which seemed to convey a deep meaning.

A few minutes elapsed when Lancaster proposed another beer.

Erastus assented to the treat after some haggling over the assertion which he made that his friends should not pay for anything while he had his pockets stuffed with so much money.

"Have it your own way, then," yielded Lancaster.

"Bring it to me. I'm tired," said Erastus, with head rocking on his shoulders, and looking cross-eyed at the bar.

The bumner seemed to have succumbed at last and was sprawled out on the floor just beyond the partition, where the curtains hid him from the view of other customers who might enter, though not from the occasional glances of disgust flung that way by the barkeeper.

Lancaster brought forward two beers.

The barkeeper stooped behind his counter to rinse a glass.

With a lightning movement, and with his back toward Erastus, Lancaster dropped something into the glass—something which he took at a pinch from his vest pocket.

"There you are," he said, handing the stranger his glass.

"An' here's the money—you pay for it," handing the other a piece of silver as he spoke.

Lancaster turned again to the bar to deposit the money before drinking the beer.

And if his movement had been quick in placing something mysterious in the glass offered Erastus, no less quick was the action of the latter in tipping the contents into the spittoon beside the table.

When Lancaster again came forward, Erastus was wiping his lips and spitting lazily, as if his last drink did not taste so palatable.

"Where's that hack?" he asked.

"Be here in a minute."

And at that juncture a vehicle was heard to come rumbling up to the curb, where it paused before the saloon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ELECTRIC PISTOL AGAIN.

YORK came sauntering in.

Both York and Lancaster had seemed to endure the ordeal of beer-drinking with a wonderful staying capacity—or else they had not drank at every treat called for by Erastus, probably disposing of the contents of the glasses in some sly manner.

At all events, they were both strictly sober.

Erastus alone seemed to have suffered out of the trio—not counting the bumner, of course.

"Here's your hack," York said, after an inquiring glance at Lancaster, which was returned in a way that seemed to afford him some inward satisfaction.

"All right," mumbled Erastus; "I'm ready for it, I tell you. Why, I believe I'm half-tipsy!"

"Oh, no; you're good for a dozen tipsy men yet, you are."

"Come on!" urged Lancaster.

He assisted the wealthy gentleman to his feet and toward the door, which York obligingly held open.

"Why, if it isn't dark!" exclaimed Erastus bewilderedly, and halting on the pavement.

"Yes; we've been inside there for a time, I tell you, and punished a heap of beer."

"And (hic) are you tight, too?"

"Oh, we never gets tight, we don't!"

"No, we're used to it. Come on—get into the hack!"

York was now holding open the door of the hack.

But in that transient moment of a halt close to the door of the saloon on the outside, something had transpired which had entirely en-

escaped the notice of the two men, York and Lancaster.

A small and boyish figure was leaning against the door-frame when they came out.

Supposing it to be some mere lounge, they paid the figure no attention.

But when Erastus entered the hack, this figure moved away from his position near the door, and he carried under his coat the small sachel containing the mass of greenbacks which Erastus had so conspicuously displayed in the saloon.

Erastus had adroitly passed the sachel to the party in the brief moment of that pause on the pavement.

Away went the hack, with Lancaster inside with the stranger.

"How far is the hotel?" queried Erastus de Binbow, as they rattled along at a brisk pace.

And while the cab was thus speeding off, the bumper in the saloon seemed suddenly to revive, and he started staggering toward the door.

"Go on, now; there ain't no more suckers 'round here for you to bleed out o' whisky!" shouted the barkeeper after him.

No reply came from the bumper.

On the pavement he gave a glance in the direction whence came the sound of receding wheels in rapid revolution.

Then he started across to a densely-shadowed spot against a lumber-yard on Virginia street, where he disappeared.

Within a minute a man appeared coming from the same spot—a man attired in the tight-fitting garments of a jockey.

This party moved at a rapid rate toward the trestle of the Allegheny railroad, reaching it at a point below the canal and on the bank of the roaring James.

As he approached, the same figure which had been at the door of the saloon advanced, evidently to meet him.

"Is all prepared?" interrogated the man in the jockey suit.

The voice of the inquirer was that of Jo Call, the detective.

"All ready to a dot," was the response.

"Come, then."

And he asked, as they moved along the side of the canal:

"You got the sachel all right?"

"Yes. I sent it up to the office by the new clerk."

"The new clerk?"

"Why, yes—the one Mr. Tuff sent down to be employed. Said he came from Baltimore and had been used to clerking in detectives' offices."

Call was silent.

There was something strange about his partner having sent a new clerk to be employed without having advised him of the fact previous to the occurrence.

These two sleuths were not in the habit of doing anything of an ordinary nature that was not fully known to both.

"Have you made the connection with the ladder?" he asked.

"Yes, made it this afternoon when the track man was passing. I didn't have any trouble when I explained to him what it was for."

"You didn't, eh? And you had to go into particulars, I suppose, with the trackman?"

"Couldn't get a ladder up without I did so."

Jo Call did not appear to be in an altogether satisfied humor over several things that were thus coming under his notice.

"And the police?" he put again, as they moved forward amid the tangle of the trestle that reared high above the canal, making their course toward the distant docks.

"You will see them presently."

Then the young clerk, who was playing a part in the game laid out by the two detectives, ventured to ask:

"Do you think you will bag the men to-night, Mr. Call?"

"What men?"

"Why, the men you are after."

"Do you know who I am after?"

"No."

"Where are the police?" questioned Jo Call, abruptly.

"Not ten feet ahead of you."

"And the ladder? Ah! I have it," as he reached out a little to one side against one of the massive timbers supporting the railroad overhead.

Depending from the track above, fully a distance of forty feet, was a rope ladder.

And while the detective was feeling of its strength, a form came forward from the gloom that was more dense because the moon was being hid by scurrying clouds, indicative of a rain.

"Mr. Call!" spoke a voice.

"Well?"

"Is it you?"

"I."

"We are here, awaiting instructions."

"How many of you?"

"Myself—and five more."

"Have you arranged with the train-dispatcher?"

"Yes. No more trains will come forward from the dock until after midnight."

"Good. That will afford time enough for what we wish to accomplish, I think. Ascend the ladder to the trestle. Lie down when you are up, so that a person coming from the direction of the docks cannot see you until they are at least abreast if not past you. The quarry will soon be here, or—there will be one of the best detectives on the force murdered."

Without stopping for an explanation of this ominous speech, the leader of the squad of policemen who were in waiting there summoned forward his men and himself led the way up the swaying ladder that led from the tow-path of the old canal to the high trestle-work of the Allegheny railroad.

"Remember," Call said, to the last officer who started to climb the ladder, "you must not give the slightest indication of your presence up there until I give the signal—a discharge from my revolver. Then you will bag any and every body who may be between you and the man the men will pursue—the pursuing men, I mean will be after a single man. You understand?"

"Oh, we all understand that, sir."

Jo Call moved away from the trestle.

As he went, he muttered:

"I don't like all this thing about a new clerk—the telling of the trackman about the business in hand, and so forth. Who knows but that the trackman is one of the very roughs we are after. Bah!"

The detective began to climb a tree on the tow-path—a tree that had evidently been selected in his mind before coming there.

A very tall and convenient tree; for when he had ascended into the high boughs, he was almost on a level with the trestled railroad track.

From the perch he could command a view of the track for some distance in both directions—a view that it required a keen pair of eyes to profit by on that night of alternate moonlight and cloudiness.

And hardly had he gained the point of observation when something thrilling burst upon his gaze.

Far down the inclined plane could be distinguished several figures.

They were ascending the steep grade—humans who were running as fast as the precarious foothold would permit.

Men's forms darting along the cross-ties at the elevated and dizzy height, with the chance of falling and being dashed to pieces below at every running step.

An enthusiasm seemed to arouse within the waiting detective.

"They are coming! Tuff is still alive!" burst from him.

He drew his revolver from its belt and cocked the hammer in readiness for the giving of a signal agreed upon between himself and the policemen on the trestle ahead, no sign of whom could be seen at the moment.

Ahead of the many figures who were approaching thus singularly over the great trestle, was a more prominent one, who was exerting himself, apparently, to outdistance those in his rear.

"Good for Tuff!" he cried, to himself, again. "He is a brave one! We've got them! We'll bag some at least, of The Roughts of Richmond. The trick has worked. Come on gents—your trap is ready for you!"

Meantime, another thrilling scene had transpired in the immediate vicinity of the docks, and at a point where the track that approached at an incline by the trestle was at its level with the tow-path.

The wealthy and drunken Erastus de Binbow, had arrived at a point near an old warehouse by the docks, when it halted abruptly.

Erastus was aroused from a seemingly unconscious sleep on the cushion and told to get out.

"Hey! Why, where the deuce are we now? What's this? I don't see any hotel."

"Old man, you're drunk, an' you know it. You've been hauled over into Manchester by a driver as drunk as yourself. We've got to cross the James—"

"But I don't see the foot-bridge."

"We're below the foot-bridge, an' what's the use keeping this cabby any longer, when he don't know what he's a-doin' with them there reins. You ought to 'a' knowed better 'an to bring a gentleman a-roamin' round this-away, when all wot he wants is to be took to the Exchange," Lancaster said to the driver, with an oath.

York pretended not to hear.

"We'll take a boat an' soon be over, an' my word for it, I'll soon have you snoozin' in the hotel, I will."

A boat seemed to be very conveniently at hand, into which Erastus was pushed by Lancaster.

York climbed down from the seat on the hack and joined them, his place being filled and the horses driven off by a party who had evidently been crouching low in the foot of the vehicle.

In a few moments these two men had Erastus de Binbow on the tow-path.

And then he seemed to suspect that all was not right.

"You men are fooling me! You mean to rob me!" he cried, suddenly.

As suddenly, too, all sign of his recent intoxication passed away, and he gripped each man by the collar with an astonishing force, more astonishing because it was so utterly unexpected.

The movement saved the life of Timothy Tuff—for no less a person was it.

At the very instant that he turned and changed his position, and at the same time jarring the others by his forcible grasp, there was a transient illumination on the spot, like a limited flash of lightning.

A streak of fire passed before the detective's eyes.

But the terrible and deadly electric pistol had failed this time of its mark.

At a wrench the detective had the weapon in his own hand.

At another wrench he had drawn his own revolver and was cocking it, when forth from a fringe of bushes on the lonely path darted no less than a half-dozen figures, and the moon just then coming from behind a cloud showed him the gleam of weapons in the hands of every figure.

"Cuss your bungling hand, Lancaster, you've almost given us dead away!" howled an angry voice.

CHAPTER IX.

FACING A HORRIBLE DEATH.

It had at first been the intention of bold Timothy Tuff to capture the two rogues whom he now knew to belong to The Roughts of Richmond, by the fact of one of them having attempted his assassination with the mysterious electric pistol.

Upon seeing that they had accomplices so close at hand, however, his whole plan changed as quickly as had been that futile flash of the remarkable weapon aimed at his head.

"I'll bag the whole gang!" passed through his brain, with the rapidity of a flash. "For I know that Jo Call is ready and waiting for me to carry out the original programme!"

With which resolution, he turned and started on a terrific run up the incline of the railroad track, each step that he took on the cross ties placing him higher and higher above the ground.

One of the spectral figures that had darted forward from the ambushing screen of bushes raised his weapon to fire upon the fleeing man.

The revolver was knocked from his hand by the leader, who snarled, angrily:

"You fool! Do you want to have all the watchmen of the warehouses on top of us?"

Then he added, to Lancaster:

"Down him with your electric pistol—"

"The cuss has got it—I ain't."

"What?"

"He took it away from me so slick 'at I didn't know what he was a-doing."

A terrible oath escaped the lips of this mysterious leader of a robber band.

For that they were a robber band was now no longer a question; the smooth little game that had been played upon Erastus de Binbow revealed the character of the men calling themselves York and Lancaster.

But the fleeing detective was hardly prepared for the revelation that came in the next speech of the man.

It is no easy matter to carry on a rapid flight on the cross-ties of a railroad, especially if there is no ballast between, but instead, a yawning space, down into which the fugitive, at the first false step, may plunge to his death.

Timothy Tuff had not, therefore, gotten far over his perilous route and could hear the loud words of those in his rear quite plainly.

"An' did we tumble to the racket of the sleuths an' all that an' get that bound into this hobble to see him clear himself as easily as he is now doing? After him! You can run over those ties quicker than he can, because you have been in the habit of making your way over them since you were boys. After him, I say! and when you catch him, hurl him headlong over—over into the rocky bed of the James, if you have strength enough!"

"Thank you!" thought Tuff, as he redoubled his efforts.

At the command from their chieftain, the spectral figures instantly took up the chase, exhibiting that the former had not overestimated their ability to make rapid progress along the dangerous way.

The words which he had heard were a surprise to him.

They showed that in some way, he must have been known in his true character all along to the men who had intruded themselves upon him at the time of his supposed arrival on the train from West Point, in the character of York and Lancaster.

Instead of the detective playing a game upon the gang he and his partner were trying to trail down, in some manner the gang had ascertained their plot and had played them instead.

It was all now very plain to Tuff.

The presence of the additional villains at the tow-path was a part of their own carefully-arranged plan to make away with the over-bold detective.

"But they don't know all—not all!" he exclaimed, in an underbreath, casting a glance over his shoulder to see if many were following him.

All were following.

"They don't know all, I guess, or they would not be so brave following this chase. I shall lead you into a pretty trap presently, my larks!"

No longer having any apprehension that those in his rear would fire upon him after the command of their leader, he devoted himself solely to the plan of leading them forward far enough to come abreast of the policemen who he knew must be in waiting under the leadership of his partner.

The chase on the inclined plane grew more exciting.

The spy members of the mysterious band were gaining on the fleeing detective at almost every step—one of them actually running with a dare-devil speed along one of the rails, his arms outstretched like the balance-pole of a tight-rope performer.

If it was to be merely a matter of adeptness at making progress along the ties of the elevated Allegheny road, the detective was in a fair way of being overhauled and pitched into the rapids of the river at one side.

At this juncture, and as Tuff knew that he must be very close to the spot agreed upon for the presence of the policemen, something of an additionally thrilling aspect transpired.

Far up the track there was suddenly heard a dull rumble.

Two great red eyes, like dragon eyes, attracted the attention of the ambushed police.

Attracted too was the detective in the tree, who cast a glance in the direction whence came that ominous rumble.

Tuff saw and understood.

Though an arrangement had been made with the maker-up of trains at the dock end of the inclined plane, there evidently was another, a freight train, approaching at tremendous speed from the other direction.

Now indeed did he exert himself to reach that point where he knew there must be a rope ladder by which he could descend from the track among his friends.

The police had already spied the oncoming train.

Forgetting their errand entirely in the presence of this prospect of being crushed to atoms beneath the iron wheels, they arose and began scrambling for the first to reach the ladder.

Over they went, like monkeys, disappearing from the upper surface of the bridge.

Tuff at the time was midway between the enormous piers that sustained the structure at that point.

Many feet on either side were between him and the chance to escape from the track.

And closer, and closer the great red eyes of the backing train, while the rumble grew louder and louder.

At a frightful velocity the cars were coming down the steep grade, to crush and destroy anything that might unfortunately be in their path.

The gang behind the detective saw their danger.

But they were at the moment right at one of the stone piers, and in a trice every one had skipped over alongside the barrel tank there, crouching and clinging for dear life, though comparatively safe.

On, on, the train!

Louder the rumble!

Brighter those red eyes—the lamps on the top of the caboose!

Perched in his tree, Jo Call held his breath.

He saw his friend and partner in this terrible menace without the slightest chance to help him.

He realized, besides the fact that Timothy Tuff must be doomed, that the whole plan for the capture of the gang, or a portion of the gang, was a failure.

It would be useless to halloo; nothing could stop the train.

The engine was far back; the red-lighted caboose came on—on at a speed that seemed momentarily to increase as the plane became even more inclined as it neared the tow-path.

Another moment, and all would be over for Timothy Tuff.

Another—it had come—it was past!

On thundered the train over the spot where Jo Call had gazed, half-petrified with horror, at the dimly outlined figure of his unfortunate partner.

Then the lights disappeared, the rumble receded, the engine came and passed—down and on went the train, its runners unconscious of the fact that a death had probably been consummated by the merciless wheels.

"It's all over with poor Tim!" muttered Call to himself, as he descended sadly from the tree and approached the knot of officers gathered at the point where the fortunate ladder was.

"That was a close shave, Mr. Call," said the

chief of the squad. "But shall we go up again?"

"No use in that. Look!"

He pointed off at the trestle, where the headlight of the backing locomotive rayed brightly over the track.

The figures of the tow-path gang could be seen following the train rapidly downward, their shapes having a grotesque appearance in the weird light.

"No use in that now. And poor Tim—he's done for!"

"Who's that?"

"Timothy Tuff. Did not you see a man directly in the path of that accursed caboose? Why, gentlemen—to the squad, who had gathered around—that train has killed my partner, Timothy Tuff, as fine a specimen of detective as ever drew a pair of handcuffs to the click."

After a sighing breath, Call said:

"Come; we must find his body."

A few moments later there was a flashing of bull's-eye lanterns in and out amid the massive spiles and timbers that supported the elevated track.

"One of you go up the ladder again and look around," said Call, after a fruitless search for some distance in both directions along the course of the network of timbers. "Perhaps the body is wedged in between the ties, or dangling there in some shocking manner."

Again the lanterns flashed about, but in vain, for some trace of the supposed dead detective.

"No use," Call muttered, sadly. "He must have been tangled in the truck of the caboose and carried away toward the docks."

And he added, as they emerged once more on the bank of the river:

"Nothing can be accomplished toward the recovery of the body until daylight. I wish you," to the leader of the squad, "would attend to a renewal of the search here in the morning."

"I will, sir."

At this point the man who had been dispatched up the ladder, to search on the top of the trestle, returned.

"Find anything?" Call interrogated.

"Nothing at all—not even a drop of blood."

"That is strange," mused the detective. "If he was killed, there would certainly be some signs of his mutilation in the form of blood."

"None up there, sir."

The detective left the police after a re-admonition regarding a resumption of the search on the morrow.

But as he reached the pave of Virginia street and hastened up toward Main, he was muttering, while he frowned:

"I don't understand it. And it almost looks as if Tuff was not killed by the caboose. Surely, we would have found some evidence of his death in fragments of flesh or at least some blood. Something tells me that Tuff is still alive."

A surprise greeted him when he reached the agency at Capitol Square.

The clerk—the same who had been with him shortly previous—came forward, saying:

"The new clerk sent here by Mr. Tuff has disappeared, sir."

"He has, eh?"

"And he left this note, addressed to the firm name of Call & Tuff," handing over a small missive.

Call broke the seal and read:

"When you expect to corner The Roughs of Richmond, do not hold conversations where a spy of the gang can overhear you plot to entrap them. Adieu. Better luck next time. Ta, ta!"

"As I suspected," he muttered. "The fellow was not sent here by Tuff at all. A cunning spy of the gang—"

"Two ladies in the rear room wish to see you, sir," said the clerk, interrupting, when his employer had read the note.

Call immediately stepped back.

Here another surprise was in store for him.

Two deeply-veiled figures sat upon the little lounge.

CHAPTER X.

JO CALL'S VAILED VISITORS.

It was not the mere fact of two ladies being in the rear office that surprised Jo Call.

It was an apartment for private consultation with clients, and ladies and gentlemen both had frequently sat there to unfold their troubles to the famous detectives, Call & Tuff.

But as he entered, one of the females arose and drew aside her veil, revealing a very beautiful face.

The face of Erminie Fenwick.

"Good-evening, miss," he saluted, politely.

"Good-evening, sir. I have called to make a communication."

"Miss Fenwick, I believe?"

"Yes. We have met before. You remember—the same hour in which you called upon my mother in regard to my father's mysterious death."

"What have you to communicate?" the detective asked, appropriating a chair before her.

At the same time, he was wondering who the second female could be and was striving, with-

out betraying too much curiosity, to penetrate the thick veil covering her face.

"Something further in regard to my mother."

"Your mother?"

"Yes. You know that I entertain some very dark suspicions concerning this sudden death of my father—"

"Pardon me, Miss Fenwick, but I really think you had best disabuse your mind of the suspicion you hinted at to me when we met last night."

"Has anything transpired, particularly, to make you believe that I am so very wrong in that suspicion?"

"Well, no, nothing particularly."

"And something 'particularly' has transpired to strengthen my suspicion."

"Indeed?"

Erminie made a sign to the female at her side. The latter in turn removed her veil.

"This is my mother's maid—Plura, is her name. Plura has overheard certain expressions from my mother's lips, when my mother had not the slightest idea that another could hear, which, as I say, serves to strengthen the suspicion I have before named to you."

"What has Miss Plura heard?"

"Tell the gentleman," commanded Erminie, with her glance fixed upon the girl.

In the brief moment of the interchange of words between the two females, Call had taken a keen glance at the face of the girl named Plura.

She was young, and vigorous in that youth, rather comely, her outline of feature rather darkly foreign; and he was trying to imagine to what nationality she could belong when she herself announced:

"I am of Indian blood, sir, though born and reared in civilization. I am alone in the world, with the exception of a dear and younger brother who was lost to me in the great city of New York about eight years ago. I had no friends, and the family of Mr. Fenwick—he in particular—became my friends when I most sorely needed such. I have been with them for nearly the whole length of time since I lost my brother, or since he mysteriously disappeared, my object being to gather together sufficient money to pay the detectives to find him for me. In that time I have been educated both by books, which Miss Erminie bought for me and taught me from, and by the language of the family to whom I rapidly and deeply grew devoted—"

"But why do you tell me all this?" broke in the detective, who did not see anything in the girl's speech to bear upon the subject in hand.

"To show you how much I ought to, and how much I really do, think of the family of the Fenwicks, and how little cause I have to utter an untruth. I owe all I am to them, and I do not wish to shield a wrong-doer in that which injures the others who have been so kind."

"Well, about these expressions you overheard. What did Mrs. Fenwick say that you and Miss Erminie attach so much importance to it?"

"It was I who brought the summons to your office, sir, for a detective to be sent to the mansion."

"Ah!"

"When I returned to the mansion, Mrs. Fenwick admitted me herself, and she said to me: 'You may retire. I can dispense with your services till to-morrow. See that you confine yourself to your room until summoned.' I went up the stairs; but I did not go to my room as my mistress ordered, for I was feeling so sad about the accident to Mr. Fenwick. I lingered on an upper landing until I saw Mrs. Fenwick ascending. And it was while she stood on the landing near the library door, glancing about her and not perceiving me in the shadow of a niche where a statue stands upon a pedestal, that I heard words which seemed to enter my heart like a dagger of chills."

"What were the words?"

"These: 'No one knows—no one suspects. I am safe!'"

"You distinctly heard those words?"

"I did."

"What else did you hear?"

"Nothing. Though I saw her lips moving as if in speech to herself, she passed on into the library and I could not distinguish anything more."

Erminie now said:

"Plura came to me to-day, while my mother was away from the house, and related what she has told you. Now, if you will couple what I told you of my own knowledge last night, and this singular speech of my mother's which Plura relates, will you tell me whether you think my suspicion is still without foundation," and she gazed at him searchingly.

The short-statured detective leaned back in his chair, and his brows knitted thoughtfully.

"Perhaps," he said, cautiously, "there is something after all in your suspicion. But I must tell you, Miss Fenwick, that it is a terrible suspicion."

"Until this night, sir, I at least entertained a reasonable amount of love for the lady who is my mother, though she is not my own mother, as I stated to you previously. But when I saw how coldly she took the fact of my father's apparent assassination, the last particle of that affection departed. I now seek an investigation

of my suspicion—a thorough one, at all cost, if it takes all that I possess in my own right."

"Have you any suggestion to make regarding the plan of procedure?" he asked, while his keen eyes searched her lovely face.

"None at all. I know nothing about the mode of operation customary with detectives. I only know that I wish to employ you to follow out my suspicion, and I will pay any reasonable amount for the trouble it may cause you."

"Leave it then entirely in my hands, Miss Fenwick. And let me advise you, that if you expect me to accomplish anything in the direction you indicate, you must not do anything to cause your mother to suspect that you distrust her."

"I must play the hypocrite?"

"Well, yes, in that particular, to some extent."

And he added:

"This young lady, your mother's maid, you say, are you quite sure that she will not betray what you suspect or that you have set a detective to watch the woman who is your mother?"

"My lips are sealed if Miss Erminie so orders," answered the Indian girl for herself.

"Can you tell me one thing?" the detective said.

"What is it?"

"Do you know anything of an object, an insect, known as the golden beetle?"

A half-startled look came into Erminie's face. After a momentary hesitation, she replied:

"I do. I spoke to you of such a thing last night, you must remember."

"Tell me what you can about it."

"I know nothing, except that there is such a remarkable thing in my father's library."

"You call it a remarkable thing?"

"It is."

"Some bauble, I suppose, like young ladies wear in their hair, or upon their hats sometimes, eh?" and his keen eyes were fixed piercingly upon her face.

"No, it is nothing of the kind. It is a beetle of gold, mounted on a table of black marble with gold trimmings, in an alcove in my father's library, and—and—"

"Well?"

"It is alive," she said, jerkily.

"A golden beetle, alive. Pshaw!"

"What I say is true, sir. I saw the strange thing for the first time last night, and I swear to you that I saw it move."

Call was silent.

His "feeler" had resulted in a confirmation of the singular information given him by his partner: that there was a thing in the shape of a golden beetle in the Fenwick mansion, and it was mysteriously endowed with life!

And he had seen a ball of mystery and radiant trappings, in which was a similar object of gigantic proportions, in the abode of a man who was familiarly known as Arban, the astrologer.

"Why did you ask me that?" Erminie broke in upon his transient meditation.

"Because— But no matter. You will please not push me with the question. Let us drop that subject. I will attend to your request in regard to Mrs. Fenwick."

"You will lose no time in pushing your investigations?"

"Rely upon me for all the expedition possible. By the by, when will the funeral take place, Miss Fenwick?"

"It is set for two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"Thank you."

"We bid you good-evening," said Erminie, starting toward the door, and followed by Plura.

Hardly had the two females departed from the detective agency, and while Call was yet in his private office thinking deeply upon this additional development regarding the mysterious Fenwick family, when the clerk entered to say:

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Call."

"Show him in."

A portly man, with gray hair and beard of silvery whiteness, was ushered into the apartment, and the clerk closed the door after him.

"You are one of the firm of Call & Tuff?" he at once interrogated.

"Yes; my name is Joseph Call. What is your business?"

"Ah! yes, that is it. I have some business with you. I could have obtained other detective service, but I preferred your agency because of its high reputation. I have been here twice since the supposed assassination of Mr. Dorsey Fenwick, but you and your partner were both out. My name is Upton Girard."

"Ah, indeed!" and Call pushed forward a chair for his visitor.

He recognized instantly by the name, though he had never before met the gentleman, that he was speaking with the President of the Agricultural Bank.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he inquired, courteously.

The bank president adjusted his gold eyeglasses, and drew from an inner pocket a memorandum-book.

Finding a certain page in the book, which he held with his index finger between the reclosed covers, he glanced at the detective, saying:

"My business is in relation to a certain remarkable transaction by one of the most prominent men in the community, and for some time a heavy depositor at our bank—that is, no less, Mr. Dorsey Fenwick. We have been deliberately swindled, sir, by that party, to the extent of nearly twenty thousand dollars!" and as he said this, Mr. Upton Girard gave an emphasis to the words that brought his portly body to an extreme upright position on the edge of his chair.

"Twenty thousand dollars," he repeated.

"That is a pretty big amount, sir."

"Big? It will almost cripple the bank, if it becomes known to the depositors at this time when the country is so full of trouble among bankers and brokers, for a run will immediately begin and we may be compelled to close."

"May I ask how such a swindle was perpetrated by deceased, especially as you say he was a heavy depositor?"

"I'll explain. It is easy to explain—too easy. A few days ago Dorsey Fenwick drew all his cash deposits from the bank and deposited in another bank. I have since ascertained that the last deposit, every dollar of it, was made in his wife's name. Observe that this occurred before the swindling operation, so that my bank cannot attach the new deposit, more especially under the wife's possession. Now then, we held nothing of his but twenty thousand dollars' worth of Richmond and Danville Railroad bonds, which of course were retained, as they were a collateral on that amount of money specially advanced at a time in the past."

CHAPTER XI.

A TICK FROM THE TELEGRAPH.

As President Girard proceeded with his explanation of the swindle his bank had sustained, he grew warm, and mopped his brow with his handkerchief nervously.

"These bonds, I say, were deposited with us, on which we had made a previous loan. They were permitted to remain in our vault by Dorsey Fenwick, because of certain negotiations pending with the authorities of Baltimore for a loan to the Richmond and Danville, in the event of the consummation of which the bonds would be of increased value. Now, yesterday afternoon—and it was singularly, too, just before the closing of the bank—Dorsey Fenwick came to redeem the bonds. He offered in payment bags of coined gold, brought in cased bags, the amount stamped on the outside of each bag. One of the bags was examined, but in the hurry of the closing hour, the rest were taken at their stamped value. I say the bag examined was all right, that is, I mean, the count—"

"And the rest turned out otherwise, eh?" inserted the detective.

"Wait, wait; let me tell it my own way. As far as count is concerned, everything was right enough. But the coin—that is what I am about to speak of. Eagles and double eagles comprised the deposit for which we returned to Dorsey Fenwick his bonds. Here is one," and he handed over a ten-dollar gold-piece.

Call was instantly on the alert for a discovery which he half anticipated.

The moment he scanned the edge of the piece, he saw that it was similar to the one shown him by Bob Boswick, the police detective.

With a wonderful ingenuity, the entire circle of the coin had been lathed out and re-filled with some grosser metal and finished with such exactness that it required an extraordinary keen inspection to discover that a portion of the gold had been extracted.

"Do you observe anything peculiar about it?" Girard asked.

"Oh, yes."

"What?"

"It has been lathed out and re-filled."

"You have keen eyes."

"Not unusually so, under the circumstances, since I have seen the same thing lately and was prepared for the disclosure."

"Every piece that Dorsey Fenwick deposited at the bank is like that—like it in being deprived of a portion of its genuine metal and being filled with a grosser compound of some deceiving sort," declared Upton Girard.

"The police are already on the track of these shrewd money-turners," Call said, "and I have no doubt they will soon be caught—"

"But that is not the thing."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that of course this spurious money is of no account to us; we want to get the bonds back, and then if the heirs of Dorsey Fenwick choose to redeem the bonds with good money, of course they can have them and we will remove the attachment."

"The attachment?"

"To be sure. We of course instantly obtained an attachment upon the bonds, wherever or with whomsoever they may exist, because they were, very plainly, obtained from the bank by deliberate fraud. My business with you is to procure them for us if you think you possibly

can, and for such service, the bank can afford to pay a thousand or so."

"Why not approach Mrs. Fenwick upon the subject. I am sure, if her husband has been willfully guilty of such a transaction, she would wish to screen the name of the dead and would either return them to you or refund to the amount necessary in good money. The Fenwicks are rich."

Girard interrupted him with a dissatisfied wave of both hands.

"Mrs. Fenwick does not know anything about the bonds."

"How do you know that?"

"For the simple reason that there were no papers on the body of Fenwick when found by the police, excepting a few unimportant letters of correspondence. I obtained that information at the police station. No, he was robbed. Perhaps the robbers anticipated catching on him the very gold which he deposited with us. In that they were evidently disappointed; they have bonds that they cannot use. You now know what it is I wish you to do: find the bonds if you can. Will you undertake it?"

"Certainly."

"That is all I have to say, then."

"Do you intend to keep the matter quiet until you hear something from my efforts?" the detective asked.

"Yes. I have no desire to cast disgrace upon the family of the man because that man turned out to be a rogue; especially so as the man himself is now beyond the reach of the law."

"I admire your decision and will exert myself to do my best."

Upton Girard took his departure.

But the detective was to have another visitor.

Hardly ten minutes had elapsed, when the clerk broke in upon his profound mood of study with the announcement:

"A lady to see you, Mr. Call."

And he added, as his employer looked up:

"It is one of the two who were here a little while ago."

"Show her in."

A veiled figure entered.

At a glance, and before she had drawn aside the veil, which she immediately proceeded to do, he recognized her as the girl, Plura, who had been there with Erminie Fenwick.

"Ah," he said, "what has brought you to me again?"

"Something, sir, that I could not well reveal while I was with Miss Fenwick."

"What is it?"

"I have more to tell you that may cast a light upon the mysterious murder of Mr. Fenwick."

"Be seated, please—"

"No, I have not the time. I do not wish to be suspected of having come here again."

"What is it, then, you have to say?"

"Something in regard to my younger mistress, Erminie Fenwick."

"What about her?"

"There is a mystery attached to her also."

He regarded the girl without saying anything.

"I know," Plura asserted, "that in the earlier part of the evening on which her father was brought home dead, Miss Erminie secretly met with a man in the garden of her home—a man whom she herself admitted at the gate."

"Well?"

"I happened in the arbor near the gate, and it was just inside the gate that they paused for a low conversation, the most of which was not audible to me. I saw her, however, in the moonlight, hand to this man a package that was plainly money, and she said to him: 'It is all I can give you, and I hope it will be enough. Go, now—haste! I hope the sum will prosper you, from my heart I do!' Then the man departed. I have come to tell you this, not knowing whether it may have any bearing on the case of Mr. Fenwick, but supposing that perhaps you may glean something from it."

"Do you know whether your mistress has been in the habit of meeting men in her garden?"

"I am quite sure she has not until last night."

"Have you ever noticed any suspicious characters about the premises?"

"No more so than usually in the neighborhood of people well-to-do, where alms may be sought."

"Has Miss Fenwick any very intimate friend that you know of?"

"Only one that could be so considered."

"Who is he?"

"A clerk in the post-office. His name is Albert Royal."

"And you believe that this information will serve in some way to cast light upon the murder of Mr. Fenwick?"

"Did I say that? Well, I hardly know what I said. But I thought you ought to know everything that was transpiring about the house."

"Thank you for your interest."

Keenly as he regarded her, he failed to detect anything like a hidden purpose in the zeal she was exhibiting in the case of the murdered man.

"I will hasten back now," she said, readjusting her veil.

He accompanied her to the door.
"Sleek," he called, to the clerk, when she had gone.

"Sir?"
"Find Wing-Wing and tell him I want him."
"Yes, sir."

The clerk took his hat from its peg and started from the office hastily.

Jo Call retired again to the inner office, leaving the door partly ajar in order that he might have an eye on the entrance.

He seated himself at a desk and began a study of a small column of figures which had been obtained from the bank president—the numbers of the missing bonds.

While thus engaged, he was attracted by a sound at one side of the room!

Tick! tick! tick!

Against the wall was a very ordinary looking box.

But when Call had hurried to this box and opened it, in answer to what was a telegraphic signal, a splendid instrument was revealed upon its interior—a complete telegraphing apparatus.

The instrument was then silent.

Call grasped the ticker and sounded an answer.

Immediately the instrument began again:

Tick! tick-at-tick-a-tick! tick! a-tick! a-tick-a-tick, then increasing in rapidity until the ticking seemed to be one continuous tick-a-tick-a-tick-a-tick-a-tick.

As he bent his ear to read the message by sound, his face suddenly beamed and his attention was wonderfully absorbing.

When the sound had ceased, he slammed shut the box and turned round with the half-suppressed exclamation:

"Good! Hurrah for Tuff!"

The message over this private wire had come from one of the public offices on Main street.

Its words were:

"Alive and all right. Made a big spot. I can put my hand on the leader of The Roughts of Richmond. Got him dead to rights."

"TIM TUFF."

"Alive and at work! That's Tim all over!" he exclaimed again, rubbing his hands delightedly. "And I know Tim doesn't waste words over anything that has nothing in it. If he says he has made a spot, he has done it—Hello, Wing-Wing!"

Into the office came dancing a Chinaman.

Behind him the clerk who had been sent after him.

It had not required much time to find the Celestial; his shop was in a little alleyway not far from Capitol Square.

"Melican d'lective want Chinamanee come hop skippee, hullaa, you blet!"

"I've a little piece of work for you, Wing-Wing—some more shadowing for you to do, since you made such a good thing of that last job I intrusted to you—"

"Wing-Wing top heap allee ttime, bully boy ghostee, fillyem upagain," and he danced about in evident delight at the prospect that the detective, whom he had served in some previous affair, intended to employ him again.

"Come here, Wing-Wing."

And closeted in the rear room, Jo Call put the Chinaman on the trail of the post-office clerk, Albert Royal.

After a few minutes' conversation, in which the cunning Celestial seemed to perfectly grasp the detail of his task, Wing-Wing danced out of the office, his face beaming with a broad grin.

"Now for Tuff," Call uttered, to himself, and passing through the front office. "If anybody comes, Sleek, I am afraid I shall not be back until morning."

"All right, sir."

Call knew exactly from what office the telegraphic message had come to him over the private wire.

To this office he hastened.

Though expecting surely to find his partner there, he was disappointed; there was no sign of Tuff.

But a dark-faced individual was standing at the desk, having a message sent off, and the clerk was just then inquiring:

"If there should be an answer to this, sir, what is the name and address?"

"The name is Alvaro Mandez. Of the address, no matter. I shall honor myself to call again."

And instantly the detective discovered in the face of the man the leader of the spectral and mystic Order of the Golden Beetle, whom he had seen during that adventure in the well-known abode of Arban, the astrologer.

CHAPTER XII.

A SHADOW ON THE SIGNOR MURGUIO.

JO CALL gave no sign that he had particularly noticed the dark-featured personage at the receiver's desk.

But when this individual started to leave the office, Call made a motion to the clerk that said:

"Silence! Do not betray me."

And instantly there was a most remarkable transformation in his appearance.

In a thoroughly changed guise, he at once followed the man who had given his name as Mandez.

The Italian, for evidently such he was, cast a glance behind him after taking a few steps along the pavement.

Perhaps he anticipated that he would be followed.

But the leisurely strolling gentleman he saw there, puffing lazily on a cigarette as he walked caused him no special interest.

Yet that party was Jo Call.

Onward went the Italian.

At Fourteenth street he turned up the steeply inclined pavement; soon Call observed his quarry enter the Exchange Hotel.

Then, when Alvaro Mandez disappeared upstairs, he advanced to the office counter and asked:

"Has that gentleman been stopping here long?"

"Which gentleman?"

"The one who just now went up-stairs with his key—Mr. Alvaro Mandez."

"I guess you must be mistaken, sir. The last gentleman who received his key here, within the minute, is Signor Murguio."

"Ah, and what is the signor's business?"

"You will pardon me, sir, but—"

"See this," and Call slyly exhibited his badge.

"You observe, I have some right to ask."

"Oh, yes. Well, I really could not tell you what his business is, perhaps a gentleman of wealth and no more. He is always plentifully supplied with money."

"Been stopping here long?" Call repeated his former question.

"About a month."

This information tallied with the knowledge which the detective possessed, that the man called Arban, the astrologer, had first assumed some prominence in Richmond about a month past.

"Pays his bills promptly, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, and in gold."

"Indeed. Have you received any gold from him lately?"

The clerk evidently did not like such close questioning; but there was something about the manner of the man whom he now knew to be a detective which seemed to impress him that all might not be straight with the Signor Murguio.

"Yes, sir, he paid his bills not an hour ago."

"Will you oblige me by showing me some of it?"

The clerk's curiosity now assumed a tangible interest.

It instantly flashed upon him that the distinguished guest of wealth was probably no more than a counterfeiter.

"Certainly, sir—certainly," with alacrity, and turning to the great safe behind him.

He brought forward several gold-pieces, laying them in the detective's palm.

Call examined them closely and returned them.

"Anything the matter with them?" asked the clerk, alert for some remarkable development.

"Oh, no, not a thing in the world. They are all genuine beauties. Why, can't you tell a genuine piece when you see it?"

"Of course I can. I knew there wasn't anything the matter with the gold," and jingling the pieces together, he returned them to the safe.

When he turned again toward the counter, the detective was moving rapidly from the office.

Retracing his course to the telegraph office, he accosted the clerk who had been mystified by seeing this person assume, in a twinkling, a disguise that would render recognition in the shape in which he had first entered the office an impossibility.

"You will do me the favor to show me the telegram sent off a few minutes ago by the man calling himself Alvaro Mandez."

"Can't do it, sir."

"Oh, yes, you can."

"Positively against the rules—"

"But what about this? And do you want me to proceed with my object in such a way that it may cost you your position?" and as he spoke with authority, he once more exhibited the talismanic badge.

Reluctantly, and as if only half assured that he was warranted in the action, the clerk held forward the slip of the telegram recently deposited by Alvaro Mandez, being careful, however, to retain a hold upon one end of it.

"That will do. Thank you."

Call had read the following—an apparently very simple message to a supposable friend in the city of Baltimore:

"It is so very hot and so soon in Richmond, that we shall avail of a quick departure for the north. You will expect us at the rendezvous shortly and make the room for six."

ALVARO MANDEZ.

The address of the party to whom the message was sent, was Carl Crup, No. — street, Federal Hill, in the city of monuments.

As he was about to leave the telegraph office, one of the instruments began a great noise of ticking, and at the very doorstep he was halted by the voice of the clerk, saying:

"Hold on, sir; I think there is a message for you here."

"For me?"

"Wait."

And after the instrument had ceased its noise, he asked:

"Is your name Joseph Call?"

"Correct, my friend."

"You are a detective?"

"Did I not show to you my badge?"

"Then there is some one at your office—the office of Call & Tuff, on Capitol Square—who wants to see you."

"Thanks."

Away went Call in answer to the unexpected summons.

When he reached the office, he was slightly and agreeably surprised to find there his partner, Tuff.

A hearty hand-shake ensued between the two, as if they had been separated for a generation rather than a few hours.

"Bless your soul, Tuff! I gave you up when I saw the train go right over you. How in the name of creation did you ever get out of that scrape?"

"A very simple thing for a man who can keep his wits about him under such trying circumstances—for a man who cannot, I must say his chances for escape would be somewhat slim. I merely dropped through the trestle, arm's length, and hung there until the train had passed, and then, my dear boy, then—"

"Well, and what then?"

"I crawled it lively after The Roughts of Richmond, who, thinking I was killed to a certainty, were following the train down the grade. As I told you in the dispatch sent from the office on Main street, I spotted the leader of the gang by playing a little Injun among the trees and bushes. There was a lively time among them, I tell you, when they found that they were being so closely hunted, and their only consolation appeared to be in the conviction that I had been chopped to pieces by the wheels of that caboose. On the bank of the James, between the railroad bridge and wagon bridge, the gang dispersed, and I was luckily able to follow the man I knew to be the leader. At the first opportunity I sent you the message, and that was when he entered the office on Main street, to send a message himself. The office was full at the moment, but I got ahead by using our private instrument, and because I could operate myself. You saved me the balance."

"The balance?"

"Yes, I retired to the outside to wait for my game, when along you came, and I presently saw that you were following him up for some purpose. I left him to you and came here. Where is the fellow hanging up?"

"At the Exchange. And do you tell me that that man is certainly the leader of the gang known as The Roughts of Richmond—the murderous gang with the ingenious electric pistol?"

"I do, and I captured one of their infernal contrivances. Here it is," and Tuff showed the pistol he had wrenched from the grasp of Lancaster just in time to save his own life.

"The man was not attired much like a rough or ruffian," said Call, queringly.

"No, before he came under your notice, he had been to his home and attired himself in gorgeous black."

"Where is his home?"

"Arban, the astrologer."

"Ah!"

"I think we shall find something shortly for which Arban, the astrologer, may be pulled," said Tuff, significantly.

For while it was well known that the man, Arban, was an astrologer, his business had not been such, to the knowledge of the police, that he could be hauled up on any charge of wilfully swindling through the credulity of the public.

All that he had ever been known to deal in was a legitimate sale of horoscopes cast upon the birth of individuals, which any well-read student of the stars could furnish at this day if supplied with proper books and instruments.

The two detectives entered upon a detailed exchange of confidences; it was their rule that what one knew the other should know, to avoid any action on the part of either that might clash with the operations of the other.

"What about this Alvaro Mandez—or Signor Murguio, as he is known at the Exchange?" queried Call, when each had exhausted his budget.

"In what way do you mean?"

"He is contemplating leaving the city," and the senior detective related what he had surmised from the telegram which he had compelled the clerk in the telegraph office to show him.

The wording of the telegram, to a casual reader, would not have purported much; but to these two sleuths it meant, that Alvaro Mandez—or Signor Murguio—felt himself getting into too hot water in Richmond, and proposed a flight with his gang to join another and probably equally murderous gang in Baltimore.

"Well, he can't leave the city without my knowing it," said Tuff, with an emphatic nod.

"Why?"

"Simply because I have placed a shadow on him. And now, Call, let us do that little piece of investigation I suggested. I am sure that there is no one in the house of Arban, the astrologer, since I saw our quarry come out of it dressed as a man of fashion. Come."

"I am ready."

"I have a curiosity, too, to see the wonderful workshop you have hinted at in the subterraneous depths of that building—"

"Wait a moment," said Call, stepping to a cupboard.

He came forward, presently, with a small green bag over his arm.

Tuff knew that the bag contained a complete set of the most approved burglar implements of the kind that could be carried in such a limited compass.

The two started forth from the agency.

Call looked at his watch.

It was after the hour of eleven.

"If your Signor Murguio makes the Exchange his *bona fide* sleeping place, he is no doubt asleep by this time," Tuff remarked, as they moved away rapidly toward the gloomy building on Fourteenth street below Main.

"Yes. We shall have a fair field, I guess. And unless I am greatly mistaken, I can show you the mint whence issues all this spuriously tampered-with coin that is in the market lately. We shall lead the police detectives slightly, though I gave Bob Boswick a pointer, as I told you."

At that hour, when they arrived before the building of mystery, the locality was darkly deserted and uninviting.

Pausing for a hasty glance around—for they did not wish any interference even from the police with whom they could have easily arranged matters had they chosen—Call advanced up the broad flat step.

After a few minutes' work at the lock of the door, he said:

"Come. It is all right."

In a trice they had gained the interior with the aid of the tools brought along.

For a few seconds the daring duo of detectives paused in the pitchy dark hallway, listening.

Then Call opened the blaze of his bull's-eye with a click and flashed it around.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEARDING THE BEETLE IN ITS BURROW.

No sound broke the grave-like stillness of the surroundings.

The building appeared to be entirely deserted.

"Go ahead," whispered Call.

Tuff led the way, under the guiding instructions he had previously received from Call.

At the landing where Call so narrowly escaped being hurled to his death, they took to the massive banisters and passed, like crawling monkeys, over the dangerous boards.

And Call observed that the spot was so wonderfully well contrived that the fatal trap could scarcely be detected even by a narrow search.

"We can take the steps again here," he said, when they were safely over.

At the top of the staircase they came to the door which was, as we have seen, the entrance to the room of the astrologer.

Call knew the way well.

He had not forgotten a single item of the manner of his former hasty exit from the place.

Once more the tools were brought into requisition by Call, for the door was locked; and during the operation Tuff kept a keenly alert glance about for any possible menace.

Soon they stood within the astrologer's apartment, amid the various and singular articles that composed his means of consulting the stars: telescopes, revolving globes, terrestrial and celestial, massive charts and volumes, all scattered about in confusion among the rich furnishings of oriental magnificence.

"This way," Call said, now taking the lead.

Followed by Tuff, he advanced to the curtains which screened the descent to the underground chamber of the Order of the Golden Beetle.

There were no lamps burning beside the narrow inter-mural way; and when they had noiselessly, in their rubber-soled gaiters, descended to the strange and wondrously beautiful chamber, this too was involved in darkness through which almost dully flashed the intense ray of the bull's-eye.

Even this scant light, however, revealed to a great degree the superb draperies and tinsel-gleaming appurtenances of the mystic rotunda.

Call was attracted by seeing a door at one side, which he was sure had not been visible when he had previously passed through the place under the forced guidance of the Indian boy.

"Where is this slab you were telling me about—the slab that opens over the stairway to the lowest room?" Tuff inquired, guardedly.

"Wait a moment. I have a notion to look beyond that door."

"What door?"

Call pointed.

It was an iron door, but apparently not a formidable one.

Call felt that he could easily pry open the jamb with the tools they had with them.

"Go ahead, then; I'm with you. We might as well see the whole show while we're in."

The tools were equal to the emergency.

It was not long before the welded "keeper"—which was on the side toward them—was forced, and the bolt of the lock relieved from its hold.

The door was then easily swung open.

"Look out for pitfalls. I have reason to apprehend them at every step we take," cautioned Call, as he paused at the threshold of the blackest compartment he had ever looked into, and vainly endeavored to penetrate the depths beyond with his usually keen eyes.

"Hold the lantern, Tuff."

Even the bull's-eye did not wholly dispel the darkness beyond.

It seemed that, so intense was the gloom, the brilliant rays were completely swallowed up within the distance of a very few yards—and that they were at the entrance to a very large room was instantly apparent.

"Why, this must extend beneath the building adjoining this one," he said, lowly.

"Hark!" admonished Tuff.

As they listened, standing like statues, and Tuff at the same time shutting the slide of the bull's-eye, they heard a rasping, ratchety noise, like some one sawing.

It was faint, though, as if the operator—if it was some one sawing—had in some way deadened the blade of the saw with cloth.

Enough noise was this hidden person making, though, to have shut from his ears the slight sound occasioned by the cautious detectives when they opened the door.

No further word passed between the venturesome pair, but Call beckoned and started into the room, boldly followed by Tuff, and the latter let on just a faint ray from the lantern to guide them over what was another floor of flags.

Then there was another pause.

Before them, close to the extreme wall, was a boyish figure.

The figure was on its knees beside an opening that had been made by some means in the flags, one of which was turned over.

The sound they had heard was the sound of sawing.

It was the Indian boy, Ischan.

At the moment they came upon him—their presence strangely unknown to him—he was at work, hard and steadily, sawing through one of the monstrous and thick girders that appeared to be the mainstay to the flagged floor.

And by the depth attained by the saw at the moment in the ponderous timber, it was apparent that he would soon accomplish his singular task.

"What are you doing there?" demanded Jo Call, stepping forward and laying an arresting hand on the boy's shoulder.

A startled cry burst from Ischan.

He leaped to his feet, leaving the saw sticking in its cut.

Tuff turned on the lantern fully, flashing it on the lad.

"What are you doing, sawing that timber through? Do you want to bring the whole house down around your ears and be crushed to death instantly?"

"Yes! Yes! Let it fall! Death—death to all of them! I will die if I can also accomplish their deaths! The fiends!—devils! I know you are not of them—I know it by your voice. I have heard your voice before. Let me go on with my work—"

"Hold on! Not while I'm in the house, if I know myself," catching the boy forcibly by the arm as he would have stooped again to his task of sawing the girder.

And, while he held Ischan thus, he asked:

"My boy, what does this mean? What has happened to you?"

For both he and Tuff were struck to shuddering by the strange and awful appearance of the Indian boy's countenance and had been gazing at it with something like a feeling of horror from the first.

"You ask what has happened?" cried Ischan, in an accent of wailing misery and rage.

"Look—look at my eyes! Do you not see? I am blind. I have no eyes. They are gone—gone forever!"

He turned squarely up into the light of the bull's-eye such a face as might well cause a cold chill to creep over their veins.

A face of blood and tears, where were seared marks as of burns, and the sockets of the eyes no longer containing the orbs of sight, but two oozy and horrible lumps of sickening aspect!

"My eyes! My eyes! Do you not see? They have burned them out!"

"Your eyes burned out!" both exclaimed, suppressedly.

"Yes," and a torrent of painful sobs burst from the bruised lips of the boy, though he closed and gritted his teeth to hide them in a combined torrent of savage rage.

"I want vengeance on them! Let me go on with my sawing. I will bring the house down

about their ears as they work, and all, every one, will be killed. I shall have my vengeance. After that, I care not to live. What will life be to me without my eyes? Let me have my vengeance," and he began a struggle as if he was determined to proceed with sawing the girder in twain.

Call held him firmly.

By their united efforts and kindly assurances, they succeeded at last in bringing Ischan into something like a subdued mood.

"Your eyes have been burned out?"

"Yes—yes! They are gone forever. Oh, the agony of that hour, that awful hour!"

"Who has done this?"

"They—the Order of the Golden Beetle. Ah, now I know your voice. You are the same man I cast down the trap at my master's bidding, and who afterward compelled me to lead him from the building."

"Yes, I am he."

"Ah, if you had never come in here at all! It is all because of that act of mine, which you compelled at the point of your pistol. You are to blame."

"In what way am I to blame?"

"I tried to explain to them, when they came rushing up, that the shot had been fired by me by accident, and I showed them the weapon, with one barrel empty. Ay, I swore to my words to save my miserable life. But they would not believe. I was seized and cast into this chamber until an investigation could be made. Fatal investigation! They discovered, at the bottom of the curtains where the secret way leads up to the room of the trap-fall, and where the dust has long gathered, the imprint of my gaiters and of yours—two imprints, one large and the other small. The trap-room was examined, and the man whom my master expected to find there was missing. To them all was plain. I had liberated you. They came into this chamber and told me that I should be tortured. Oh, how I begged for my life! They were merciless. With hot irons they approached me and made to burn out my eyes. I shrieked in misery—but what use in these chambers of thick walls below the surface of the earth? I struggled with all my strength. What use, when they were many and powerful men. In the struggle the irons burnt many times all over my poor face. And at last—oh, God!—at last they struck into my eyes, burning, singeing, biting like the fires of the furnace of Hades. My eyes were gone in an instant! I fainted. When I recovered, I was alone—alone in the blackness and left to die. But I remembered, in the midst of my writhing torture, that I had once brought in here a saw that had been used when they made some repairs in the council-chamber. With the saw I pried up one of the flags; with the saw I could have cut through the main girder of the floor and brought the whole house down upon their heads, even as Samson destroyed his persecutors. Let me go on with it, I beg of you. I will give you time to get out. When the crash comes you can be safe—"

"Not much!" broke in Call, at this point in the horrible recital. "We have another destiny for those you seek to destroy—though they richly deserve such destruction at your hands. You will go with us, my poor lad, and we can at least lead you to a haven where your misery can be lessened."

Turning to Tuff, he said:

"In the cause of humanity, had we not best take this boy to the hospital without delay?"

"Whatever you say, Call. But he said something about bringing that floor down upon the heads of those who were working below. Those we seek may be at their business at this moment, and we could at least pause for a sly peep upon the mysterious gang, couldn't we?"

"True." And he said to the lad: "There are some of the Order of the Golden Beetle working in the apartment beneath this floor?"

"Yes. It is upon them that I would hurl this whole floor by sawing the girder. The weight is very heavy and it would not be long in crashing down. I would rather do that than go with you."

"Guide us to the trap and show us how it may be raised, so that we can take a look at the gang below. Then we will lead you to safety, my lad. You will find that life, at any sacrifice, is sweet, after all, when the pain of your eyes has been soothed and nursed. Come."

Yielding to their kindly urging, Ischan moved away with Call's gripe gently on his arm.

"You will have to lead me," said the boy, hushedly, "to a flag in the center of the council-chamber, where the other flags will count six each way."

"I have it," said Tuff, presently.

But ere the boy could give any direction as to how the slab might be raised, a thrilling incident transpired.

A sound that was a combined laugh of a dozen sepulchral voices filled the chamber.

Forth from the two entrances to the hall—the entrance leading to the room of the astrologer and that leading to the room of the trap-fall—glided swiftly and surroundingly a dozen white-clad and hooded figures, each carrying a trident of gleaming and sharp steel.

The tridents were lowered to a charge.

Then forward, from both sides, they rushed upon the surprised detectives, their eyes flashing with deadly purpose from the eyelets in their masks of white skin.

"Death to those who would spy upon the Golden Beetle!" shouted a stentor voice from beneath one of the masks.

"Death!" rung in concert the voices of the rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN BEETLE.

THE undertaker had completed his arrangements for the sad obsequies of the morrow and taken his departure from the Fenwick mansion for the night.

At Mrs. Fenwick's request, however, he had left a man to remain watching with the dead in the rear parlor.

An experienced person at the business, evidently, for he very composedly and sleeplessly kept his vigil, devoting himself to an absorbing novel which he had brought with him.

Throughout the mansion the silence that ever comes with the presence of death reigned supreme.

The servants had retired to their dormitories, if not to sleep, to gossip in whispers of speculation and conjecture upon the remarkably sudden death of their employer.

The lights in hallways and rooms were lowered dully, and an aspect of very ghostliness seemed to pervade at every turn.

Like a phantom from this spectral semi-gloom, a figure moved down the staircase and to the front door.

Mrs. Fenwick.

There was an uneasy look in her beautiful face.

She made secure each bolt, chain and lock on the door, then turned and flitted toward a door that, at the extreme end of the broad hall, at the rear, opened into the garden.

Passing out, she ensconced herself mysteriously within the shadow of a tall bush.

From her position she could not see the gate that led to the street, but her glance was turned in that direction steadily.

For nearly half-an-hour she retained her position, and at last her watching was rewarded.

A female form came hurrying forward evidently from the gate.

She stepped out from her concealment, saying, a little sternly:

"Well, Erminie?"

"Mother!"

Erminie was at that minute returning from her visit to the detective agency.

The unexpected encounter with her mother seemed to unnerve her for a moment.

"Where have you been?"

The answer was prompt and to some extent truthful.

"To see the detective who is to conduct the investigation regarding my father's death. I too have offered a reward, to induce him to greater efforts."

"You have been nowhere else?"

"No."

There had been at first a shade of suspicion in Mrs. Fenwick's manner; this now vanished at the prompt and reasonable explanation of her daughter's absence.

"I do not like this way of going out at such an hour unprotected, Erminie. But I am glad to know where you have been. I can appreciate to an extent your interest in the sad affair. Now come with me. I wish to tell you as I promised, something of the golden beetle that is in the library of your dead father."

She gently slipped her arm in that of Erminie and moved with her toward the side door.

As they disappeared within, another figure came around the bend in the shrubbery-lined walk.

The girl, Plura.

As she observed the two ahead enter the house, she paused, exclaiming:

"Ah, the very opportunity I wanted. I can now slip back to the detective agency, and Miss Erminie, missing me, will suppose that I have retired to my bed."

Then Plura hastened back over the route to the agency at Capitol Square, where she had the second interview with Jo Call, as detailed in a previous chapter.

Mrs. Fenwick led her daughter to the library.

"Be seated, Erminie, and lay aside your hat. I shall not detain you long; but what I shall say will show you that I have long had good cause to expect your father would meet with a violent death."

The beautiful woman was so perfectly composed, in the midst of an hour when it would be supposed she would evince a weary grief, that Erminie gazed at her in silent thought and a nameless feeling of wonderment.

She thought her mother had never appeared so very beautiful as at that moment; her eyes filled with a feverishly-brilliant luster and her face slightly glowing as from a recent excitement which she controlled admirably.

Drawing near a chair for herself, close to Erminie, she said:

"What I shall relate to you, my child, was

told to me by your father scarcely a month ago. He seemed to feel at that time the approach of the hour of his doom—as the Fenwicks have felt it for generations; that is, those who in turn have been cursed by inheriting the mysterious golden beetle. It is an heirloom. Its exact origin is the secret that underlies its dangerous presence in one's family. Upon the genealogical tree, far back, is the name of Rufus Fenwick who, says the tradition of your father's family, was an English gentleman of lordly wealth. He was a great traveler. In Milan, he met with a beautiful maiden, the child of a professor of languages there, with whom he fell desperately in love. The father of the child did not like the Englishman and forbade the marriage, a truly honorable one, which Rufus Fenwick proposed.

"In consequence of this parental opposition, the young man—for Rufus Fenwick was then young—persuaded her to elope and wed with him, which was successfully accomplished. Rufus and Para, the Milan maiden, were very happy for awhile, until the enraged father discovered their whereabouts. Then the humor of a devil entered his heart. He resolved that the child should pay for her disobedience with her life, and after that, he would wreak his vengeance upon the Englishman. The means he employed to accomplish his vile purpose was a most ingenious one.

"Rufus and Para, living in superb style at Paris, were accustomed to receiving a host of friends upon certain occasions, and were frequently the recipients of rich presents from their friends upon whom they had themselves lavished many tokens. On a certain occasion when there was an unusual array of presents displayed at a garden party given by Para on a birthday anniversary, one of the presents was something very unique in the shape of a golden beetle from an anonymous giver who wished for the happy couple lifelong joy in the same note in which he explained—or she explained as far as they then knew—that the strange and jewel-eyed thing should be worn to pin nosegays at the throat.

"That same night in her boudoir, Para, in a most happy humor, and before disrobing, tried the appearance of her strange gift with a bunch of flowers that were upon her dressing-case. To fasten the pin which was on the under side of the golden beetle she had to press very hard, to obtain a firm hold. The pin was all ready to adjust when it should have been forced through the fabric of her dress. She pressed hard, I say; and thereupon ensued something that was terrible.

"Instantly, under the pressure, the claws of the golden beetle darted inward at her throat and imbedded themselves in her fair skin, remaining there with a tenacity which her frightened pulling could not undo. Her shriek brought the young husband running into the room. He saw his lovely wife sink to the floor. As he stooped to raise her tenderly in his arms, he perceived that the claws of the beetle had entered her flesh by some mechanical contrivance that was a part of its interior. At one wrench he tore the vile thing away, even disfiguring the skin at the throat of the lovely Para.

"As he did this, there occurred that which told him that the demon father's vengeance had struck at the life of the child indeed. Over the sill from the balcony, with a rapier in his hand, leaped the Milanese professor, and as he came, with the weapon flourishing, he uttered such a cry that for a moment the Englishman was petrified. 'You may have my child now, accursed Englishman!' were the words of the cry. 'Keep her for all that she may be worth to you—whatever a dead body may be worth; for within five minutes she will be a corpse!'

"These terrible words aroused the startled husband to action. He sprang to the wall at the head of his wife's rich couch, where was, fortunately, a splendid weapon of the same pattern as that being flourished by the Milanese. With this in hand he sprang upon the slayer of his beloved wife. The sharp blades clashed and smote there over the unconscious form of the beautiful Para. They fought a duel that was to the death—a double death; for when the attendants came running to the apartment, overcome with alarm at such sounds as emanated from it during the terrific combat, they found both men lying on the floor, bleeding out their lives.

"The Milanese was already dead. The Englishman lived long enough to explain what had transpired, then breathed his last, with the dying request that the fatal golden beetle be forwarded to his brother, then in England, to whom was bequeathed a lifelong hate for the whole race of Milanese. Para never opened her eyes after the bite of the golden beetle. Side by side the lover husband and wife were laid in the tomb. And the golden beetle then began its wonderful figure in the line of the Fenwicks. James Fenwick, the brother to whom the thing had been sent, swore eternal vengeance upon all who were of the blood of the Milan professor. He visited Milan and spent money lavishly in procuring the ruin of many relatives of the professor who had killed his brother. At one time he provoked a duel with a distant

cousin of Para's father and slew him with a vengeful skill.

"When James Fenwick left Milan, there was not one of the family of the professor remaining in it, so terrible and merciless had been his persecution of them. He returned to England. He had an altar built—an altar of black marble with gilded trimmings—on which the golden beetle, with the pin removed, was mounted and preserved as long as he lived in the ancestral home. As long as he lived, I say. But that was not long.

"Returning from a meet of hounds, one day, he was surprised to find that the beetle, on its marble altar, had moved from the position in which he had left it. He made strict inquiry, but it was proved to him that the door of his library had remained locked during his whole absence. And then came a greater surprise than the first; for when he turned to look upon the thing again, lo! it was even then, under his very eyes, moving slightly forward, as if imbued with life and striving to crawl! An irresistible superstition seized him; he had curtains placed before the altar to shut it from his sight when in the apartment. He became morose and given to seclusive habits—habits which terminated in his death shortly subsequent. He was found dead in his bed one morning, and the Golden Beetle, with its horrible claws, was fastened on his throat!"

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the rapt Erminie, who had listened with wide eyes to the strange story.

"More than this, my child, there was pinned a note to the counterpane, which contained the announcement that James Fenwick had met his death at the hands of a relative of Para's father—a Milanese. Just at that time a cousin of the family, also bearing the name of Fenwick and attached to the queen's service, returned from duty in India. He was in time to attend the burial of James Fenwick, and at the grave he made oath that he would one day avenge his cousin's murder. He took charge of the fatal golden beetle and its black altar. Scarcely a month did he survive the possession of it.

"Andrew Fenwick—that was his name—was missing from the barracks one night; the next day his dead body was found floating near the bank of the Thames. Marks of bruises on his head and body were decided to be those inflicted purposely and not by accident. It was accepted that again a Milanese had struck. And then it came out that one of the servants at the barracks had heard him muttering previous to his disappearance that he had seen the golden beetle move over its slab on that very day. So you see, Erminie, the remarkable thing gives a warning of the approach of death by making a slight movement out of the position in which the owner placed it."

Erminie shuddered as she remembered that she had seen the beetle make a movement at the time when she ventured alone in the library, on the previous night, to pull aside the curtains.

Involuntarily her gaze turned toward the curtains.

"Yes, Erminie," Mrs. Fenwick said, as she noted the glance, "it gives the never-failing warning of coming death to its possessor. And not more than three days ago your father called me into the library, where I found him holding aside the curtains and regarding the object with dilated eyes. He scarcely heeded my entrance, though he knew when I was by his side, for he said:

"Look, Mathilde! the golden beetle. It has moved! I am a doomed man!"

"From that moment your father was a changed man; to the hour in which we learned of his death, he was not like himself of yore. He was evidently preparing himself for death, and I was powerless to disabuse his mind of the conviction that he was to fall as had fallen others before him."

CHAPTER XV.

A BURGLAR IN THE LIBRARY.

"How did my father become possessed of it?" inquired Erminie, after a brief pause, during which both mother and daughter were gazing at the curtains screening the dread beetle from them.

"Your father, as I can show you on the genealogical tree, is a direct descendant of the Fenwicks, though the families and the name have been considerably intermixed by marriages for many years; indeed, he was the only surviving member of the actual name at the time of Andrew Fenwick's death. When the lawyers advertised for heirs he placed himself in immediate communication with them. He learned that there were others who had closer claims than himself. But one thing he could take, without any opposition from the other heirs. The golden beetle. And by the will of Andrew Fenwick, the one who should be brave enough to accept of the fatal legacy was to have an additional apportionment of ten thousand pounds. The offer came at a time when your father was really a poor man because of unsuccessful speculations, and he did accept it. Besides, at that time, he expressed himself as not afraid of all the golden beetles in the wide

world. His incredulity has resulted as we have sadly witnessed. He, like all the Fenwicks who have owned it, has been stricken down by a violent death."

"At the hand of an assassin!" exclaimed Erminie, suddenly.

"Yes, and even in your father's case, the hand of the assassin is traceable."

"A Milanese."

"Yes, in the past—no doubt in the present."

Erminie appeared thoughtful for a moment.

"Then, mother, we should give this point to the detectives, that they may search more particularly for a man who is a Milanese. Did you think of that when you put the detectives to work upon the case?"

"No, I did not."

"It must be attended to."

"I agree with you," said Mrs. Fenwick, with undoubted sincerity. "It is an important item. I am very anxious to see the murderer of your father brought to a swift justice—Hal!"

She sprung from her chair, and with one hand clutching it at the back, fixed her gaze on the near window.

"What is it, mother?"

"I am sure I saw a man's face peering in at that window."

"I did not see anything."

"I tell you I am sure."

Both advanced to the sill and looked forth.

But the moon had disappeared long ago behind the banking clouds, and it was impossible to discern anything at a few feet distant from the window.

"A mere fancy, mother. I was looking almost in this direction at the moment you seemed to be startled. I saw nothing."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Fenwick, reluctantly accepting the suggestion.

And she added, closing and fastening the window at the same time carefully:

"You had best retire now, Erminie. It is growing very late."

"I think I shall do so, mother. Good-night."

"Good-night, my child. And," solicitously, "do not let your young mind be disturbed by the narrative which I really felt it my duty to utter to-night."

Erminie sought her bedroom—a small but very luxurious apartment on the same floor with the library and overlooking the garden.

But she could not instantly banish from her thoughts the substance of the strange recital she had heard from her mother's lips regarding the fatality of the golden beetle.

"I must have air," she murmured, advancing and throwing up the sash to admit the freshness of the evening, laden with the scent of early blooming shrubbery.

Carelessly she glanced over the sill before leaving it.

As she did so, she saw, by a faint increase in the light from the cloud-hidden moon, a form at the side door below.

Some one was evidently trying to enter.

"Who is there?" she called.

"Oh, Miss Erminie! I am shut out. Won't you please let me in?" responded the voice of Plura.

Erminie descended and admitted the girl.

"How came you to be shut out, Plura?" she interrogated.

"I saw you and your mother, miss, going together into the house, and as we had returned from our mission to the detective agency, I held back, thinking not of the consequences; I wanted, for no special reason, to remain in the cool garden. When I tried to admit myself, I found that you or your mother had fastened the door. I did not like to ring the bell for fear your mother would admit me and question me. She has such a way of fixing her eyes on one, miss, that I always feel as if she was glancing right into my soul, and I am afraid I could not help telling her all that transpired at our interview with the de—"

"There, Plura. You may retire, now. It is not necessary to speak at all of our visit to the detective agency. I have told mother that we were there."

Plura hastened toward the stairs at the rear of the mansion by which she was accustomed to gain her sleeping apartment.

She had made half the distance across the broad dining-room, when a hand clutched her from the darkness.

Instead of uttering a scream of fright, the girl's tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth and every power of articulation deserted her on the instant.

"You will come with me first, Plura, before you retire," said the voice of Mrs. Fenwick, strangely.

"Oh, ma'am! is it you?"

"Follow me to my room."

Turning about, Mrs. Fenwick led the way to her own luxurious bedchamber, Plura following in a tremble of apprehension for something that she could not give definite shape.

When they were alone, Mrs. Fenwick turned and faced her, with her back to the closed door.

"I heard you speaking with my daughter, Plura. I have no desire to question you regarding the errand of your young mistress to

the detective agency, as I already know of it. It is of something else that I wish to question—and you must answer."

"What is it, ma'am?"

"This—that you have told my daughter a falsehood. You were not in the garden five minutes ago—"

"Oh, madam—"

"I say you were not there. I saw you myself come in at the gate—saw you from the entry window—a few seconds before my daughter discovered you trying to gain entrance at the door below. Where have you been, Plura, at this hour?"

"You saw me, madam?"

"I did."

Mrs. Fenwick's brilliant eyes were fixed upon her in such a way that the girl did really feel, as she had expressed it to Erminie, as if they were penetrating her very soul.

They seemed to hold her by a powerful magnetism from which there was no escape except in a direct answer to the question.

"I was out, madam," she said, hesitatingly.

"I am aware of that. I ask you where you have been."

"To the detective agency."

"You went with my daughter?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not return with her?"

"I did, madam."

"Ah! then you went again to the agency, I presume, after leaving my daughter in the garden at the time she met me."

In her soul the girl murmured:

"She reads me—she reads me as if my heart and mind were but an open book. How easily she has guessed that I went again to the agency."

"Answer me, Plura!" sternly.

"Yes, madam; I went again to the agency."

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, madam! do not ask me!"

"Tell me!" commanded Mrs. Fenwick, and giving such an additional luster to her glance that her eyes seemed to emit sparks.

Plura was in a tremble of excitement.

"I went—I went—" she said, hesitatingly.

"Well?"

"I went to communicate to the detectives something that I thought they ought to know."

"What was it? Repeat it to me!"

"Oh, madam!"

"Speak, I say!"

"It was something that I saw transpire in the garden on the evening when Mr. Fenwick was brought home, and before the hour in which he was brought home," answered the girl, wringing her hands with a spasmodic nervousness and quailing under the flash of those brown and sparkling eyes that held her as in a magnetism.

"What did you see in the garden?"

"Miss Erminie."

"Any one else?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Mr. Albert Royal."

"You saw the two together?" interrogated Mrs. Fenwick, with a somber frown.

"Yes, madam."

"Did you overhear what they said?"

In vain Plura sought to throw off the influence of the eyes.

With stammering reluctance she related to Mrs. Fenwick the same incident she had given to the detective.

"You think you saw my daughter give this young man money?"

"Yes, madam."

"That will do, Plura. You may go, now. But remember my order that you shall not let Miss Erminie know of your having acquainted me with this fact regarding her."

"I will be discreet, madam."

Outside the door, when she was permitted to depart, again Plura wrung her hands, wailing in an undertone:

"What have I done and said? I would not have betrayed her to madam; but the eyes—I could not resist the command of her terrible eyes—no, no! Ah, I wish I had lest my tongue before I could speak what I have spoken under those eyes!"

When satisfied that the girl was gone, Mrs. Fenwick went to a small writing-desk, and took from it a very small book that looked like a private diary.

"This, then," she muttered, "is the secret of the presence of the diary in the garden, which I found to-day. A diary with the name of Albert Royal on the inside of the cover. I had thought that Erminie's infatuation for that young fellow had ended when her father and I forbade his coming to the house. I shall return this to him, with an additional reminder that I have yet some authority over my child," she uttered, louder, as she cast her glance over several of the private pages without compunction, "and I shall certainly make it my business to find out what my daughter is giving him money for."

As she completed the sentence of her resolution, she started and turned an inquiring glance toward the door.

Was she mistaken? Did she not hear some

sound like the faint and distant jingle of falling glass?

She hastened to the door and opened it.

Again, though very faintly the sound was repeated.

Hastening forth and down the staircase to the rear parlor where the undertaker's assistant was keeping his ghastly vigil, she entered and asked:

"Has anything been broken in here?"

"No, madam. But I thought I heard a sound like the falling of a goblet or a glass."

"I, too, thought I heard a sound like the breaking of glass."

"It was not in this room."

Ascending the stairs she turned toward the library.

Entering here, something, she knew not what, caused her to pull aside the curtains where the mysterious golden beetle was concealed.

The next instant a low cry escaped her.

The top of the black slab was bare.

The golden beetle had vanished.

As her alarmed gaze roved around, she discovered that one of the window panes had been cut, no doubt with a keen diamond, and the loosened glass, as it fell inward, had caused the sound she had heard. Hastening to the window, she discovered that the sash was not fastened as she had left it.

Some one had been within the library.

It had not been a mere fancy when she thought she saw a man's face at the window shortly previous.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CLAWS OF THE GOLDEN BEETLE.

A MOST thrilling menace was that in which the two detectives found themselves in the subterranean chamber of the mystic Order of the Golden Beetle.

Forward came the gleaming tridents of the hooded and gowned band, from the eyelets of their masks flashing eyes that were full of a murderous fire.

Instantly the detectives turned back to back.

Tuff drew his revolvers.

The Indian boy crouched between the two, his scarred face turning this way and that as he recognized the voices of his recent torturers, and his frightened heart anticipating momentarily that he would be again in their clutches.

This brought a terror into his soul, since he had begun to think that there might perhaps be something worth living for after the kindly assurances of the detectives.

Back to back stood the daring pair.

Tuff's teeth were clinched tightly; he was determined to make more than one of these strange assailants bite the spare dust of the flagged floor before succumbing beneath those glistening tridents.

But at the critical juncture—when the sharp points were almost on the verge of piercing the bosoms of the intruders—something very unexpected transpired.

"Hold!—hold!" cried the voice of the domino that was the leader.

All paused, with the tridents shortened as they would have been driven forward for the fatal strokes.

From the eyelets of the white masks flashed looks of surprise.

"Why do you command us to pause, when we can now so easily rid ourselves of these two who have dared to come into the sacred precincts of our council-chamber?" demanded one.

"Because I would save your lives."

"How?" came from several.

"Look!" and the speaker raised one gloved finger of white to point toward the dwarf detective.

Not a word had come from either of the bold officers up to this time.

But as he saw the hesitation that evidently possessed all upon the instant when they had followed the direction of the pointing finger, he could not suppress a derisive laugh.

The object of the leader's indication was the upraised arm of Jo Call.

On high he held it.

In the grasp of the hand was a small, cylindrical tube, hermetically sealed.

The quick eyes of the leader had detected what the others did not.

The tube was one of those awfully deadly things that have figured in the doings of the foreign communes—the dynamite cartridge.

"Come on, my larks!" bantered Call. "This crowd doesn't scare worth a cent. Pitch right in. Don't deprive yourselves of the pleasure you have contemplated. We're just aching to be spitted on those beautiful tridents. Come on!"

And after a second's pause, he cried again:

"Come on, I say, and I shall hurl every one of you to the perdition you should have reached ere this—hurl you and myself, too!"

"What brought you here?" demanded the leading gown.

"My legs."

"Do not be too brave. We know that you hold in your hand a dynamite cartridge, and that with it you can, as you say, hurl us all in a moment to death. But there is such a thing as

desperate men doing what even you may not anticipate. You may find that we will even take that consequence to relieve the rest of our brotherhood of the danger which your presence here suggests, for we are bound to the protection of one another even with our lives."

Jo Call realized that this was no idle menace.

A band such as he judged the Order of the Golden Beetle to be would, probably, accept destruction, such of them as were then present, in order to protect the others of their membership who were not there from any exposure.

"What is it you're doing?" whispered Tuff to his comrade, without turning his head or lowering his revolvers, which he had steadily aimed at the breasts of two of those on his side.

"Dynamite," was the short response.

"Be careful, Jo; don't do it unless there is no other way," said Tuff, himself not a little startled at this terrible expedient resorted to by his daring partner.

But whatever might have been the thought of Call, it was abruptly terminated.

It was hardly likely that he would have dashed the frightful torpedo to the stone floor, to deliberately destroy himself as long as the slightest chance remained to extricate himself alive from their thrilling predicament.

His idea was, probably, merely to awe those by whom they were beset and obtain terms for their safe exit.

This was not to be.

Evidently the one who had assumed the leadership of the band of the Golden Beetle, was not its master, Alvaro Mandez.

Alvaro Mandez, totally unaware of what was transpiring at the house of Arban, the astrologer, was then engaged in some mysterious movements in the vicinity of the Fenwick mansion, though supposed to be in his room at the Exchange Hotel—a fact that will be explained anon.

This leader did not seem to voice the sentiment of the band.

Hardly had he made the speech when some one in the ranks of encircling enemies cried, fiercely:

"Down with them. Then let us all go to Hades together!"

"Down with them!" was taken up by the rest in savage accent.

Then, heedless of a last warning cry from the leader, once more the tridents were lowered to a charge, and they made to dash upon the two rigid detectives.

"Back, all!" shouted Tuff, desperately. "One more step, and these barkers commence to unload—both self-cockers, too!"

Seeing that the dynamite trick had not accomplished its purpose—and indeed there was no dynamite in the cylindrical tube—Jo Call imitated his partner in a twinkling.

Out came his revolvers, and without more ado, up went the hammers.

"Let the band play, Tuff—"

Bang!

Before the senior had finished, Tuff began work with his barkers.

It was plainly a case of life or death.

The detectives were determined not to die if they could help it.

The chamber was filled with the lively reports of the revolvers; the smoke of the weapons in the confined place almost instantly hid the combatants from one another.

And there were cries, too, that told the bullets were not at random sent, but every one straight into the breasts of the foremost of those who sought the destruction of the daring two.

From beyond the circling smoke each expected momentarily to see thrust forward the gleaming tridents aimed at their breasts.

But the charge came not.

And thicker the smoke.

"Hold!" cried Call, suddenly.

And a deathly silence fell.

Slowly the smoke lifted.

At the same instant, a mysterious glow from an unknown source in the direction of the monstrous golden beetle on the miniature rock, which had illuminated the surrounding during the combat, suddenly vanished, and the place was enveloped in darkness.

Not dark long, for with his foot Tuff threw open the slide of the bull's-eye which he had taken time to deposit carefully on the flags between his feet.

The dim rays of the lantern revealed an unexpected condition of things.

The detectives, with the crouching Indian boy, were entirely alone in the mystic chamber.

There was not a vestige of their recent assailants.

"Guess they've had enough," remarked Tuff, with a wary glance still on every side.

Before the two lay the evidence that their shots had not been spent in vain.

Four motionless bodies, in four pools of red blood, were lying there in the stiffness of death.

The bull's-eye was flashed around by Tuff, but nothing was to be seen of the band.

The Indian boy spoke.

"Have you escaped them?"

"That's a question," replied Call, also busy glancing about in the direction of the curtain-entrances particularly.

He expected to be fired upon from a concealment at any moment.

"Let's get out of this," he suggested, sharply, and wheeling.

"None too soon to suit me," responded Tuff.

And he added, with some dissatisfaction:

"This seems to be the second batch we have made of our game within twenty-four hours."

"For the present, apparently; so, come."

"Where are you going?" asked Ischan, as they started, with a gripe on him, toward the curtains that were before the way leading to the room of the astrologer.

"Up to the den of Arban, the astrologer," answered Call. "We'll take you safe along, my lad, never fear."

"Wait," said the boy, tugging slightly backward.

"What is it?"

"Do you suppose that the Order of the Golden Beetle means to let you escape so easily?"

"What do you mean?"

"You are walking straight to destruction," he said, lowly—so low that Call had to stoop to hear.

"In what way?"

"I will show you before I get you out of here, if you will promise not to desert me. For I do want to live now, since you have told me that you will be my friends. I know that you must be detectives, and I want you to help me to find a sister whom I lost many years ago. Yes, I will lead you out," he continued, as Call interpolated the required promise sincerely. "Tell me when we are beyond the curtains."

"Now," said Call, when they stood at the point he signified.

"Have you a light? I cannot see, you know."

"Yes."

"Then look carefully ahead."

Obedying his direction, both men recoiled a step.

For directly before them, in the way that they would have walked unthinkingly across the narrow corridor between the masonry of the underground way leading to the joisted stairs, was a yawning chasm.

"Trapped!" burst from Tuff.

"No, you are not trapped if you will do as I say," interposed their blind guide, speaking very lowly. "Make no noise. They are waiting to hear the sound of your falling bodies, or your despairing cries as you go headlong down into the bottomless pit."

"The bottomless pit?"

"It has no bottom—though sometimes I have heard the rush of waters down there, and perhaps it leads to the river of the James. But you must do as I say if you hope to escape alive from this trap."

A trap it surely was.

It presented an obstacle to their progress toward the stairs that seemed to be unsurmountable.

"What are we to do?"

"Find a place in the masonry where there is a green patch of smooth rock; strike upon that twice and hard with your fist, but do not strike so as to make a noise that can be heard to any great distance. When you have done this and have seen the result, be speedy, I pray you, in reaching the room above, and making your way to the street. Beware, too, the trap on the stairs."

Tuff did as he was instructed, for the green slab in the masonry was easily found with the aid of the lantern.

Instantly a slab that had appeared to be a part of the wall came down with a slight crash into place over the chasm.

Their way was safe in that particular.

No time was lost in hastening upward.

As they reached the room of the astrologer, they heard a sound behind them like the mingling of many rushing footsteps, with the outburst of voices in oaths of chagrin.

"Faster!" urged Ischan, nervously. "You are not yet safe. They have discovered that you have passed the pit in safety and are coming after you."

By no means were the detectives yet out of the claws of the Golden Beetle.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BUSY TIME AT THE AGENCY.

"FASTER! And do not desert me," repeated the boy. "For if I should fall again into their hands, after they know that to me you owe the fact of having passed the pit in the underground corridor, they will inflict upon me worse horrors than I have already suffered, if such a thing is possible."

It was not many seconds before Call and Tuff had gained the outer staircase and began a hasty descent.

"Take care," Ischan warned. "I told you to look out for the trap at the landing!"

Just in time the words.

In another step, Tuff, who was in the lead, would have trodden squarely upon the treacherous boards.

But now they took to the banisters, with the Indian boy between them, and not content with sliding as a boy would down the banisters of a hotel past a dangerous point, they continued,

by Ischan's advice, in the same manner all the way to the bottom.

A few moments later and the three stood upon the pavement outside the building.

Stood for a second only, and then started away rapidly.

"A fizzle completely!" exclaimed Tuff, out of humor, and seeming not to be in the least thoughtful of the fact that he had so providentially escaped with his life from what was one of the most desperate chances that had come to him in his detective career.

"It isn't over with yet by a jugful," said the dwarf detective, quietly.

"What isn't all over with?"

"Our visit."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I am going back there."

"You are?"

"I am indeed! And I shall take a posse with me and clean the ranch if for nothing else than satisfaction."

"Good! I'm with you."

They procured a conveyance and had the Indian boy placed inside with instructions to take him to the city hospital.

Before the vehicle drove off with Ischan inside, Call raised a bright hope in the boy's heart by saying to him:

"You are an Indian boy, I perceive. You are looking for your sister from whom you were separated some time ago."

"Yes—yes!" expectantly.

"Well, try and get well, fast. You may refer to Jo Call, detective, as your friend while you are in the hospital, and when you are well, find me, and I think I can give you some news about your sister."

"Find her for me and I will be your slave!" burst from him.

Adding immediately:

"But there! what use can a blind slave be to anybody?"

"I don't want any slaves, my lad; that kind of thing belongs to the past. But I think I can find your sister for you all the same. So, be of good cheer."

Call and Tuff sought the agency.

Here the ticker was set in operation at once.

In reply to the telegram which they sent into police headquarters, it was not long before six of the detective police of Richmond, headed by Bob Boswick himself, were at the agency.

"What's up?" Boswick asked, as he came in, in a slight flurry.

"We're a little ahead of you, friend Boswick," Call replied. "We've struck the source of the inventors of the turned gold-pieces. We want assistance, and it will not be my fault if we do not bag the whole crew before the night is over."

"You don't mean it?" in delighted amazement.

"That and nothing more—Hello, what's up now?"

Call turned to a man who just then came into the back office.

Tuff said:

"It's the shadow I placed on our Signor Murguio."

And drawing the shadow aside he asked:

"Anything special?"

"The man's name is Signor Murguio—"

"I know that. Well?"

"He lives at the Exchange."

"And I know that."

"He retired ostensibly to his room to-night. But after a short time he came forth and left the hotel by the Valley entrance."

"Ah."

"From there he went fast in the direction of Monroe Park. He entered a garden of house No. —. I followed. I saw him ascend to a window where a bright light burned at first—"

"How ascend to a window?"

"By a thick growth of ivy on the wall that must be fastened in a way besides its own clinging of the tendrils."

"Well?"

"Some one came to the window, and he, to escape observation, swung downward below the bottom of a rail that is there and remained in that position until the light in the room was lowered. Then he ascended again and entered the room. To do this, I saw him, I think, cut the pane of the window with a diamond. After that he raised the window and entered. In almost the same minute he came forth and gained the ground. I was not twenty feet distant from him throughout. I followed him back to the hotel. He entered by the Valley entrance and sought his room. That is all of the Signor Murguio."

"What else have you done?"

"Obtained a room adjoining his."

"Good. That will do. Return there and keep an eye on the Signor Murguio."

The shadow, without anything more to say, departed.

"Ready," said Tuff, rejoining his partner.

But at the moment into the office came dancing the Chinaman, Wing-Wing. His copper-colored face was overspread with a broad and complacent grin.

Call addressed him, at the same time taking him by the arm and leading him to the rear.

"Well, Wing-Wing, what is it—anything discovered?"

"Wing-Wing hop-skippee bullah allee ttime after post manee—see—see!" and he thrust a small slate in the detective's face.

Somebody had evidently been figuring on the slate and had rubbed off a greater portion of the numbers that were upon it.

But there remained one distinct number that Jo Call looked at with something like a thrill.

101.

Instantly he evinced a deep interest.

"How did you get this slate?" he interrogated.

"Tell me about it?"

"Spot post manee light away. Go homee. Wing-Wing makee all lightee. One man, one night, one dollee. Post-manee make heap ttime on slate"—pointing to a slate—"lubbee out an' filly' emupagain. Go bed, heap snore; Wing-Wing see keyholee. Hop-skippee, you blet, grab slatee, bullah, top heap allee, allee ttime, setteemupagain!"

"You saw the man making the figures on the slate?"

Wing-Wing nodded.

"101," repeated Call to himself.

It was one of the numbers he had received from the bank president as a number of one of the missing bonds.

Now more than ever did he desire that the post-office clerk should be watched.

He gave Wing-Wing some additional instructions and sent him off. The Chinaman made a motion that, as he removed his hat, sent his pig-tail in a swing around and touching his shins at the front; then he danced away.

"Ready," said Call, stepping out to rejoin the others who awaited his leadership in a raid upon the premises of Arban, the astrologer.

But there was to occur still another interruption to the contemplated raid.

At the instant a cab drove up to the curb and halted.

Its occupant was evidently coming to the agency.

A veiled female alighted without the assistance of the driver.

Straight into the agency she hurried and glanced around.

"What can we do for you, madame?" inquired Call, a little surprised that a female, unattended, should call upon him at that unseemly hour.

For it was now fully midnight.

"A word with you, sir, if you please."

She addressed herself particularly to Jo Call.

"Step this way, madame."

He led the way to the rear room and placed a chair for her.

To his astonishment, when she drew aside her veil, he saw before him Mrs. Fenwick.

"Have you made any progress in the case of my husband's death?" she asked, though he detected in an instant that the remark was made more for the sake of opening conversation than anything else.

"Nothing that I can report, madame."

"I have called to give you a point in regard to it that escaped my memory when I first consulted with you."

"I would be glad to hear of it."

"The man who murdered my husband was a Milanese."

"A Milanese?"

"Yes, I have reason to say that I am sure of it."

"What are your reasons?"

"Have you time to listen to a brief story? I ask, because it seemed to me that you were about to leave your office with others at the time I came in."

"If it can concern the case of your husband, I will make the time," Call said.

He stepped to the door and exchanged a few words with Tuff.

"Now, madame," returning to her, "please be brief, for as you remarked, I was just on the point of going out on some urgent business."

In a brief way Mrs. Fenwick related the story of the golden beetle as she had told it to Erminie, with the exception that she did not go so much into detail.

When she had concluded, she said:

"You will admit, I am sure, that, under the circumstances, which seem to attach to the singular object—this golden beetle—the perpetrator of the murder must be a Milanese."

"Very likely," responded Call, into whose head had at once come a prodigious idea.

"Is there anything more, madame?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"This."

She produced from a pocket a small diary.

"I found this in my garden yesterday. It must have been dropped there by the person whose name is on the cover inside—Albert Royal. This Albert Royal"—handing the little book to the detective—"has been forbidden the house, because he was so presuming as to pay attentions to my daughter. He is a clerk in the post-office—at least, he is a delivery-clerk who goes his rounds as deliverer of letters do. This young upstart has made love to my daughter. Both I and Mr. Fenwick had forbidden our daughter having anything to say to him;

yet I find that he is in the habit of meeting Erminie, and Erminie, on the very night that her father was brought home dead, met him in the garden and gave him money."

"How do you know that she gave him money?"

"I have a witness to the fact."

"Well?"

"Will you please look at the page which I marked with my finger when I handed you that diary?"

Call did so.

He received another surprise; for there was a number that was the same as the number which he had just glanced at on the slate brought him by his peculiar shadow, Wing-Wing:

"101."

"Well, madame?"

"You will be surprised, presumably, when I tell you that in the same cab which brought me here, I have been to the house of Mr. Upton Girard, the President of the Agricultural Bank, and really compelled an interview with him."

And, as the detective was silent, she continued:

"That number which you now look at was the number of one of a lot of bonds which I know my husband had on deposit in the Agricultural Bank. I was at first impressed with it in only a small degree—sufficiently, however, to cause me to make the unseemly call that I did, which was to inquire whether the bonds were still in the bank. This, because I suspected that all was not right between my daughter and this upstart of a clerk. I learned from Mr. Girard that the bonds were no longer in the bank—"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SHOCK LIKE THE SHOCK OF A FISSION.

"PARDON me, Mrs. Fenwick," Call interrupted, "but did Mr. Upton Girard have anything in particular to say in regard to the bonds?"

"They were Richmond and Danville bonds. All he told me was that they were no longer in the bank; they had been drawn out by my husband on the day the evening of which he was brought home dead."

"Well?"

A peculiar look came into the sparkling brown eyes of the woman, as she said:

"But I have formed an idea."

"Of what character?"

"My husband was murdered—at least, so decided by the coroner to-day—and you will admit it."

"Yes."

"The bonds are missing, for there were no papers on my husband's body when found."

"How do you know this?"

"I have been to the station to which his body was first carried. There were no papers, save a few letters of private correspondence, which were only sufficient to indicate who he was."

"You have formed an idea you say?"

"Yes; I think that the clerk—Albert Royal—knows something about the murder, because he has in his diary one of the numbers of one of the missing bonds."

"And how do you know that number to be a number of one of the missing bonds?"

"Because I knew much of my husband's business. I helped him to make a memoranda of the numbers at the time they came into his possession."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Set a good spy on Albert Royal—and I may add that I will be highly pleased to discover that he is in some way connected with this mysterious affair!" and for the first time, Mrs. Fenwick exhibited something like a spitefulness in her tone.

"I will do as you desire, madame," he said.

Of course he would not tell her that he was already watching Albert Royal.

Mrs. Fenwick, with this assurance, took her departure.

"Now then, I guess we are ready," said Call, returning to the main office after an absence of nearly half an hour.

No further interruptions occurred to the contemplated raid.

The posse of detectives, in police rank, started from the agency under the leadership of the dwarf detective.

Men were they—each man a hero of more than one thrilling personal record; and a formidable array it was that now proceeded toward the mysterious house.

When they reached the building, it appeared as if the band that conducted its affairs within the structure had not pursued the escaping detectives of a few hours before as far as the front entrance, for the door was open as it had been left—that is, without the fastening of the lock, which the tools, brought by Jo Call on his entrance with his partner, had forced asunder.

Probably never in the history of the detective force of the Virginia capital had so many of its best detectives, either police or private, been combined as on this occasion when the dwarf detective undertook to lead them into the den

of those who were drifting the tampered-with coin into the mercantile market.

For as he went he told Bob Boswick enough to convince him that they were about to enter the den of a desperate band calling themselves the Order of the Golden Beetle, and to which band he had traced, in his own mind, the origin of the spurious coin.

Tuff reached his partner's side as they arrived at the front of the house.

And in accordance with their rule, Call stated all that had transpired between himself and Mrs. Fenwick in such a manner of brevity that that lady would have been surprised could she have heard it.

"What is your theory on all this?" propounded Tuff.

"This: Dorsey Fenwick was murdered by a Milanese. Arban, the assumed astrologer—or Alvaro Mandez—or Signor Murguio—is an Italian already completely under our suspicion. He is the Milanese who has committed the murder. This man is Master of the Order of the Golden Beetle. Mrs. Fenwick does not suspect that much. She is probably by this time queen of the Order of the Golden Beetle, the object of which is to throw on the market the spurious coin. I believe that Dorsey Fenwick, the deceased, was a rogue. Our object now is, to capture as many of the gang as we can."

"But what about the gang called The Roughts of Richmond?"

"This Signor Murguio, by your own account of the case, is also a leader of that gang. It was in pursuance of his vendetta that Dorsey Fenwick has been slain. The Italian was all the time playing a sharp game, Dorsey Fenwick not being aware of it."

"Then you think the Italian has the bonds?"

"Undoubtedly—unless he has negotiated them quickly. In which case—if they are in the hands of a third party who bought them in good faith—the bank will have to whistle for its money. I should have thought the president would have known that, but I did not enlighten him."

"Why?"

"Because, if we can catch them upon the thief, we can take them and earn the reward. When we get through with this job, I will institute a hunt for the bonds and see if it cannot be contrived to get them back again into the possession of the party who first negotiated them—if they have been negotiated—then our course is plain sailing. I think the Italian could only feel safe in negotiating them with some one who would be willing to take risks—probably some one 'in' with him, you see—"

"What's the matter?" inquired Bob Boswick, at this point, and stepping forward to the door, as if to see what caused the delay of their entrance.

The two detectives were not the partners to give away their conversation to any one, so Call said:

"A little trouble with the lock, that's all. Now it's all right. Come on gents, and remember the instructions I have given you. The man who fails to follow minutely every action of mine as we go through this building, may find himself suddenly hurled to death. Come ahead!"

With the dwarf detective in the lead, the others entered the dangerous building.

On the stairs Call took to the banisters, being imitated by the rest, and they crawled past the perilous trap on the landing.

At the door of the astrologer's room all produced bull's-eye lanterns, and the effect of the many flashing rays was novel.

"Be prepared for an ambush at any minute," warned Jo Call, as he drew his revolver for action if necessary.

With drawn weapons and flashing lanterns the band of detectives advanced across the room to the inter-mural way.

Then down the joisted and secret stairway, and presently they stood in the council-chamber of the mystic order.

Their rubber-soled shoes had made no noise during their descent; they now stood in the midst of a most profound silence.

Everything betokened that the mystic order must be absent from the building entirely.

The iron door of the prison chamber from which Ischan had been delivered still remained open, the depth of impenetrable blackness beyond seeming like the interior of the throat of some somber and nameless monster.

But the two leaders knew what they were about.

Tuff was instantly busy counting off the flags from the center of the room, until he announced by a silent signal:

"Here's the spot!"

He stood beside the flag that was the center of the flags of the stone floor, counting six in each direction toward the walls.

A small tile in the center of an adjacent flag immediately attracted the attention of the shrewd detectives.

Call at once determined—by noticing that its edges had a loose appearance—that it had something to do with the manner of opening the secret flag.

In this he was right.

For when he had tried the tile in various ways, finally pressing downward strongly with the heel of his gaiter, the immense flag in the center of the floor moved aside as if on hidden rollers, revealing—

By no means what the detectives had anticipated!

Instead of an entrance to an underground staircase, they saw what appeared to be the ground under the floor—apparently packed and solid earth.

"The Indian boy has played us!" exclaimed Tuff, in disgust.

But Jo Call's eyes twinkled.

"No, he hasn't. This is a clever blind; we will remove that dirt."

"What for?"

"I see through the arrangement as plainly as if I had been here when it was done."

"What arrangement?"

"That is fresh earth, and the way it is packed bears the evidence of man's handiwork—not nature's."

Call had with him the same bag of tools we have seen prove of such great service to him formerly.

Some of these were availed of now, in an improvised way.

It was not long before they reached a board covering beneath the earth; and during the operation of shoveling away the earth, Call warned:

"Do not be reckless. I am sure that the major part of the gang is at this moment below here. One of their number, after they have descended, has placed the earth over the entrance and left them there to finish their work, with the understanding that at a certain time, he would return and liberate them if the coast was clear. Careful—no noise. Hark! I think I hear the sound of machinery in operation even now."

And others heard it too.

A buzzing, whirring sound, like the revolution of small wheels that gave forth a humming in their rapid movement.

When the dirt had been cleared from the planking carefully, Call himself cautiously drew up one of the boards.

He had not been wrong in his surmise.

There was a brilliant light below.

The sound from the strange workshop was even loudly audible.

He was the first to take a glance downward.

He saw there several men in shirt-sleeves, the sleeves rolled up above the elbow, and they were engaged, every man of them, at one of the beautifully constructed lathes.

From the lathes was constantly falling a stream of gold dust and the gold dust being accurately turned from the outer edge of a gold piece—slowly, adroitly and with remarkable precision.

There could no longer exist in the detective's mind any doubt as to the source of the tampered-with coin that was then attracting the attention of the money market.

He had fairly surprised the criminals at their work.

And so absorbed was each man with the delicate task in hand, and so incessant was the humming, buzzing, whirring of the lathe-wheels that none had detected the sound at the trap which gave entrance to their criminal workshop to indicate that they were being surprised.

Call assumed a standing posture.

"Ready all," he whispered. "And remember we have a most desperate gang to deal with, who will fight hard. It may be necessary to shoot down some, who I am sure will not surrender; but do not do so unless it becomes imperatively necessary. I want to capture as many of them alive as I can. I will descend first; you follow as fast as you can and make no more noise than is positively unavoidable. Be ready for instant action and a tough time."

"All ready," responded the daring detectives.

Call placed one foot on the first stone step that led to the subterranean workshop.

But at that instant something terrific transpired.

There was a slight jar of the flooring which all felt distinctly.

Then came a dull, terrible crash and a cloud of dust that seemed to puff out from the underground way like a suffocating smoke from the mouth of a nameless monster.

A noise of falling timbers, of crashing stones, of human shrieks—a noise that was almost indescribable filled their ears and brought them to an abrupt and appalled halt at the verge of the vomiting orifice.

Up from the depths volumed a universal shriek of many voices in agony and curdling misery.

A frightful calamity had befallen the crew of criminals below.

The detectives recoiled, as if expecting in the next moment to be engulfed in the jaws of a yawning earthquake!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHINAMAN WORKING HIS GAME.

For several moments Jo Call and Timothy Tuff were as much startled at this singular and awfully significant occurrence as their companions.

But as another and even denser volume of smoke-like dust came puffing from the open iron door to the prison-chamber at one side, they exchanged glances that told each the other had guessed the true cause of the catastrophe.

"The whole building may be down upon us next," Tuff exclaimed.

"Yes, we had best clear out—"

"And that makes a third fizzle!" Tuff added, with something that was almost profane. "What's got over us lately? Every time we've started out after this set of clues, we've been frustrated."

"What on earth can be the matter?" inquired one of the others.

Call explained in part.

He and Tuff realized that the Indian boy must have made more headway with his vengeful task of sawing through the girder of his prison room than they had at first supposed.

The girder had given away at this critical juncture; had it occurred a minute later, no doubt the whole band of detectives would have been crushed to death beneath the massive flooring that went crashing down, as had those who were at work at the lathes in the underground workshop.

But not all had perished.

Even as they stood, half-irresolute, out from the rolling cloud of dust emerged a begrimed figure with a bloody and ghastly face.

A man who scrambled with difficulty and in evident pain upward through the narrow shaft leading to the workshop, and who, as he gained his feet on the stable flooring of the council-chamber, uttered a cry of joy that was almost unearthly.

A cry that was quickly turned into another cry of astonishment and rage, as he found himself surrounded by many forms who carried bull's-eye lanterns, the combined rays of which were simultaneously thrown upon him.

He made a dash toward the curtains of the ascent to the astrologer's room.

But the muscular arms of Timothy Tuff encircled him, while the detective cried:

"Quick, Call! 'he irons!'"

In a trice, though not until after a desperate struggle of a second's duration, the handcuffs were clicked upon the man's wrists.

He had to be thrown forcibly to the floor and held there in the great paroxysm of rage and resistance which seized him.

When at last he lay in absolute exhaustion, a captive, Call bent over him and asked:

"Are there any more down there?" pointing toward the shaft.

"Plenty, I guess," was the response, given grimly.

"Alive, I mean?"

"If anybody is alive down there, then they had better have died when the first crash came, for they'll never get out. They at least have escaped you, you accursed detectives!"

"How do you know that we are detectives?"

"Because you were in here once before to-night."

"Ah, so you are one of those who was so very anxious to stab out my life with a trident, are you?"

"No matter," surlily.

And the captive added, as he gazed in a sort of bewilderment around him:

"I would like to know how it happened."

"What happened?"

"The falling of the floor. We built the structure ourselves, and those who managed it are skilled architects. Every girder was new and sufficiently strong to have borne a weight ten times the weight of the floor; and yet I know that there was no extra weight of any kind on the floor of the chamber over the shop."

Call did not enlighten him.

At a signal the detectives departed with their prisoner.

One and all felt, that after such a weakening of the building by the fall of the immense floor beyond the iron door, the rest might at any moment come toppling down upon them also.

"How many of you were down there?" Tuff asked of the captive, as they cautiously made their way down the stairs.

"Find out."

"A queer business has been rather abruptly broken up, hasn't it, eh?"

"Whatever you want to know, find out, I say."

"You are not a very talkative bird, but I guess you will talk a little before we are through with you."

On the street Tuff said to his partner:

"It's lucky we captured one of them, anyhow."

"Yes. But in what way do you mean?"

"From him we may get at some valuable information."

Call laughed lowly.

"I'm afraid we'll have a hard time getting him to divulge anything about the Order of the Golden Beetle."

"Well, we've brought tougher men than he appears to be to terms before this, haven't we?"

"True."

The criminal captive was duly lodged in the station-house.

For a space the two detectives paused in their rear office, alone, to sum up matters.

"Well?" said Tuff, in no good humor over the condition of affairs.

"Well it is, and very well," responded Call. "We shall soon, now, be able to run down The Roughts of Richmond."

"You're longer-headed than I am, then, if you can figure any such result out."

"Did you not say yourself that you hoped for some developments from this prisoner we have taken, who is an active member of the Order of the Golden Beetle?"

"Admitted."

And Tuff asked, suddenly:

"See here, do you have an idea that The Roughts of Richmond and the Order of the Golden Beetle are one and the same organization?"

"Not at all."

"Well, I can't talk any more to-night. I'm tired. I'll just take a snooze here in the office on the lounge," saying which, he accompanied the words by the action announced.

Call turned to a desk and seated himself.

He appeared to be a very sleepless individual at that time.

For in the hours succeeding he was busy with his

memorandum-book, and his entries were wholly relative to the Fenwick case with its various adjuncts that had assumed prominence since he had taken hold of that case.

The breakfast hour at Mrs. Tubbs's boarding-house on the day following the events of the preceding chapter, was destined to be something out of the usual order of things with her guests of various nationalities.

Patrick O'Rourke, the Irish politician, was seated as usual at the head of the table, waiting for his coffee.

On one hand was the German proprietor of the bottling establishment that had recently opened at the east end.

On the other hand was the slim French music-teacher, with his sallow white face and deeply sunken black eyes.

About the table were scattered several sewing-girls eating their hasty meal, and O'Rourke was entertaining all with his customary wisdom upon governmental finances which he might have settled long ago—as might any other whisky-drinking frequenter of the popular rum-shop—if he could have only had a hand or tongue in the management of the important matter.

At the foot of the table was a rather handsome young man who pursued his task of eating in comparative inattention to the loud-mouthed Irishman's harangue—Albert Royal, the post-office delivery clerk, who was the most liked by the landlady of all her boarders, and upon whom she openly lavished more attention than any others were favored with.

Suddenly there was a hush throughout the dining-room.

The tongue of O'Rourke seemed to have been pinned to his teeth in the midst of an extraordinary effort to explain the entanglements of the United States Treasury.

Heads and eyes were elevated.

For into the room had come dancing an altogether unexpected addition to the list of boarders, who was announced by Mrs. Tubbs in a half apologetic way as:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Mr. Wing-Wing, a rich, a very rich gentleman from the Pacific slope—"

"Howly murder! look a' that!" burst from O'Rourke.

"Gott in himmel! ware you get dot mans!" spluttered the German.

"Ah—hal ect iz ze Chinaman, ze coo-leewiz ze pig-tail," grinned the French professor.

"Ladee, gentlee, hope fine time bully boy you blet—" Wing-Wing began to say.

But O'Rourke bounced to his feet and one fist came down upon the breakfast table with a startling thump that shook and rattled everything on it.

"Mrs. Tubbs, af ye plaze, d'ye mane to scy ye've brought that haythen Chinese intil this house as a boarder, ma'am?"

"Why, he's a very rich, a very rich—"

"The devil floy away wid his riches, ma'am. It's no haythin 'll be a-sittin' down at the same table wid Patrick O'Rourke, d'ye moind; an' af he's to be a boarder, ye'll plaze make out me bill, ma'am. an'— No, I'll ha've the copper-skinned thing out, so I will! It's a insult to the loikes av any one but a nagur 'imself!"

"Dot was so!" agreed the German.

"Yees, eet was a strange insult for ze madam to have put on ze boardair of ze house."

"Git out av this, ye haythin!" shouted O'Rourke.

"You was make yourself py the outside!" supplemented the German, also gaining his feet.

There was a general uprising of all at the table.

The more timid, with murmurings of alarm, began to hasten from the room.

"Melican man no like Chinamanee, hop skipee, git; hit Chinamanee, make sweat Padeel!" declared Wing-Wing, with a significant nod, though his face was broadly smiling.

"Ye'll make me sweat will ye?" roared O'Rourke.

And then there was a sound of war in the air as the Irishman started on a rush for the despised representative of the Celestial land.

But a form interposed between the Irishman and his intended prey.

"Hold!"

Albert Royal extended one arm half shieldingly before the Celestial and gazed sternly at the irate politician.

"I think you ought to be ashamed of such conduct, Mr. O'Rourke, in the presence of ladies. If you do not wish to associate with the Chinaman who has been received by Mrs. Tubbs as her boarder—a matter that is entirely her own business and not yours—you have the privilege of leaving the house, but not the privilege of alarming these ladies and creating a disturbance. Hands off, if you please, Mr. O'Rourke."

O'Rourke had paused in some surprise. He thought of course he would be backed by every one present.

"Are ve definin' the haythin?" he demanded, very red in the face as he glared at the young man.

"I am intending to prevent anything like a Dennis Kearney exhibition in a house where I feel that I have a right to assist in preserving order. If you strike that Chinaman, you will settle with me also," and the young Southerner's eyes flashed with a determination that O'Rourke knew meant business.

With an oath that caused a shocked murmur from the females who had paused near the doorway, the Irishman strode from the dining-hall and took his hat from the rack with a jerk and a slap onto the top of his head, departing without saying more.

In an instant things subsided into quiet.

The German and the Frenchman cast sidelong glances at the young champion and each mentally concluded that he was one who could take pretty good care of himself if it came to a fight.

"I am sorry this has occurred, Mrs. Tubbs," he said, to the terrified landlady. "But I think, if Mr. O'Rourke never comes back, you are well rid of a nuisance. His incessant mouthing is far more disagreeable than the presence of this unoffending Chinaman," with which he passed out and ascended to his room.

When he descended, he was attired in citizen's clothes; his uniform had been laid aside.

As he started forth, he was closely followed by Wing-Wing though he did not suspect it.

The shadowing Chinaman, attired in his best suit, was close on the track of his allotted quarry when the latter went to the depot ticket office and bought a ticket for Baltimore, *via* West Point.

CHAPTER XX.

JO CALL PLIES THE THUMB-SCREWS.

EARLY in the morning Jo Call notified Bob Boswick to acquaint the authorities with what had been revealed to him by the detectives regarding the house on Fourteenth street and the strange accident to the building on the night past.

It was not long after Boswick acted upon this advice before the police were in possession of the premises.

Daring workmen were easily obtainable who ventured into the dangerous structure to attempt the removal of the debris from the engulfed chamber—a proceeding that was effected by entering the house adjoining that of Arban, the astrologer.

And it was discovered thereby that both houses formed a part in juncture of the mysterious temple in the underground passage.

A close investigation showed that the girders supporting the dark chamber which had fallen were independent and did not really, by their falling, jeopardize the balance of the building.

Then the work went speedily onward, and the public, only catching a mere hint that there had been several bodies buried in the singular ruins, congregated in little crowds to see when the workmen should bring forth the expected ghastly corpses.

While this work proceeded on Fourteenth street Jo Call was in his office waiting for a report from both the shadow he had placed on the Signor Murguio and on the young post-office clerk.

The latter was the first to come in.

Wing-Wing came dancing into the agency, his copper-colored face beaming in a smile that stretched his mouth almost from ear to ear.

"Plos' clerk hop skippe—buy tickce—git, you blet," he announced in a somewhat enigmatical manner.

"Bought a ticket, you say?" interrogated Call.

"Buy tickce—hullah git outee, Wessee Pontes."

"Ah!"

Albert Royal was going to West Point, he caught from the Chinaman's broken and not altogether pronounceable sentences.

Wing-Wing nodded as his employer stated the words correctly.

"Where is he now?"

Wing-Wing made a motion to indicate that his quarry was then not far off.

"After him again, then. Don't lose sight of him."

As Wing-Wing danced out again, Tuff entered.

"I can't do anything with the fellow up at the station," he said, frowningly.

Adding:

"You try your hand, Jo. You generally have had better luck at that kind of thing."

"All right. But I have something for you to take a smart hold of, Tuff."

"What is it?"

"Albert Royal intends to skip the town."

"Ah!"

"He has bought a ticket for West Point already. The train doesn't go until this afternoon, to make the connection with the York river boat up to Baltimore; nevertheless, you must watch the depot. That young man must not leave town until I have investigated him a little."

"That's fixed. What next? You're captaining the case."

"Jug him and try and frighten him into telling the meaning of the mysterious figure in his diary and on the slate brought to me from his room by Wing-Wing—101, you know."

"All right. I'll take the trail at once and keep it till he boards the train."

Tuff departed.

Hardly had he gone when a very young man entered the agency and said:

"I would like to see one of the firm."

"Mr. Call is in the back room—"

"Step this way, young man," called the detective. And when the youth had entered the rear office, he asked:

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"I'm afraid, sir, I've got some intelligence of foul play."

"Have you?"

"My employer is missing."

"Your employer? Who is your employer?"

"Mr. Caudrey Brown."

"What is his business?"

"Broker."

"What kind of a broker?"

"Stocks and bonds."

"Ah!"

There was something about the mention of bonds just then that particularly interested Jo Call.

"Well, what about your employer? He is missing—how? Run off? Anything crooked?"

"Oh, no, sir. But he is always punctual at the office and comes earlier than most business men go to their offices. He has never been late since I have been in his employ, and that has been over a year."

"How do you know that he is missing?"

"Because I have been to his house to inquire whether he was sick, and his family was worried almost to death when they heard that he hadn't been to the office since yesterday, because he hasn't been home either, and there's no word about him to be found among those with whom he dealt mostly."

"Why do you not consult the police?"

"I have a reason, sir. If there is a fuss made, and everything turns out all right—that there is nothing the matter—Mr. Brown might consider it a meddling too far in his movements by his clerks. And again, a most unaccountable thing has happened for a man like Mr. Brown."

"What like?"

"He went away from the office yesterday without locking the safe, after an interview from a dark-faced man from whom he received a package of bonds; and the bonds are in the safe."

"What kind of bonds?" demanded Call with an abrupt suddenness.

"I didn't care to examine them, sir, but I know

they are bonds, for I heard the man of whom he received them say that they had better be negotiated as soon as possible."

And the youth added:

"I locked the safe, sir, and took the key up to his wife."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Well, if fifty dollars will pay you, we clerks have agreed to make up the amount to aid in finding Mr. Brown. For he always paid us well, sir, and promptly, and was a venient man to get along with—that is, he made his clerks feel friendly toward him."

"Describe him to me."

The clerk did so.

Instantly a peculiar look came into the detective's eyes.

"You will pay fifty dollars for the finding of Mr. Brown, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'll find him for you in short order, I think. There, you may return and say to your fellow clerks that I have taken the job. Excuse me now, I'm busy."

"Thank you, sir," and the youth withdrew in excellent spirits at having so easily enlisted the services of what was considered the best detective firm in Richmond.

The business that Jo Call said necessitated his cutting short the interview was of a kind that caused him to grab his hat and immediately thereafter leave the office.

He had paused long enough only to get the address of the home of Mr. Caudrey Brown.

Within a minute succeeding his departure, a man entered the office and inquired for him in a manner of haste.

"Just gone out, sir," responded the clerk, to the comer's inquiry, and paying him no particular attention as he bent over a large ledger.

"Too bad!" muttered this party, withdrawing to the street and looking this way and that, as if in hopes of seeing the detective. "I have something important to communicate regarding the Signor Murguio."

Jo Call evidently thought that the Signor Murguio would "keep" just at that time.

A half-hour later he was hastening in the direction of the station where was confined their prisoner of the previous night's episode.

He was readily admitted to the cell.

Alone with him, he proceeded leisurely to light a cigar, the while eyeing the man who sat upon the edge of the rude cot, a dark scowl on his brow.

It was plain to the detective that this man had made an attempt since being brought in to disguise his appearance by smearing his face and variously disordering his attire, to give himself a rough exterior.

"You are in a bad hole, my friend," Call remarked, bringing forward the only stool the cell contained, and seating himself near the other.

"Am I?" was the gruff reply.

"Decidedly. If I were you, I'd make a clean breast of everything, and be let down easy, you see."

"There's nothing to make a clean breast of."

"Isn't there? Think again. Now, for instance, this little racket of turning out the edges of gold pieces and filling in with base metal—that isn't altogether the proper thing, you know, is it?"

The man gave him a scowling and searching glance.

But he was silent.

"It is all very plain, my friend; either you must make a clean confession that will result in the catching of your leader, or you will surely swing as an accomplice to the murder."

"Swing?—murder?"

"That, precisely."

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, this murder of Mr. Dorsey Fenwick, who is to be buried to-day at 2 P. M.; besides, complicity in the robbery of his body—the bonds—the Richmond and Danville bonds, you know," and Call fixed a keen gaze upon him.

He saw that a portion at least of what he had said puzzled the prisoner considerably.

"I heard through the announcement in the paper that Dorsey Fenwick had been waylaid by some one and killed," he said, warily.

"Yes, and he was robbed of twenty railroad bonds, valued at one thousand dollars each, by the party or parties who murdered him. We detectives have been pretty hot on the trail since the hour in which he was brought home. Shall I tell you what we have discovered?"

"Why should I be interested? I know nothing about the mishap to Dorsey Fenwick or any other man."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I will swear to it—"

"To save your neck, no doubt."

A shade of pallor was settling in the man's face.

"Now, my friend, let me tell you something. I have found the railroad bonds—bonds of the Richmond and Danville—in exact accordance with the numbers in my diary, which I obtained from the bank president where the bonds had been deposited previous to the murder. They are in the safe of a certain broker of this city whose name is Caudrey Brown. Here is the key to the safe," and Call held aloft a large key.

He had been to the home of the missing broker and obtained the key from Brown's wife.

He had not yet been to the broker's office and examined the suspected bonds, as he asserted; his remark was a mere feeler.

He must have derived some satisfaction from the effect produced by the exhibition of the key, for he at once added:

"And now, Mr. Caudrey Brown—for you are he—don't you think you had best make a clean confession as to how you came into possession of those bonds?—or shall I let matters simply take their course, which will assuredly result in your being convicted as a participant in the foul murder, the consequences of which you must be well aware of. In short," and Jo Call arose, standing before the man sternly. "Dorsey Fenwick was murdered, and the bonds were on his person at the time; the bonds could not be found until they were found in your safe as the property of a man—your property—w o has just been caught engaged in the criminal act of

depriving gold coin of its value with the intention of passing said coin upon the public for its full value. You are a criminal in possession of a damning proof that you were an accessory to the mur—"

"It is not so!" cried the prisoner, suddenly and with great vehemence. "I swear to you that I know nothing about the murder of Dorsey Fenwick, and I will tell you exactly how I came into possession of the bonds; I will indicate to you their source. I will do anything—for I cannot, will not, be accused wrongfully of being a murderer, I will confess!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MISSING BOND—101.

IT WAS A strange picture there in the cell of the keep.

One of Richmond's wealthy brokers almost on his knees before the unrelenting sleuth who had trailed him down to a desperate corner while in the perpetration of a cunning crime.

"I do not ask you to spare me," Brown said, brokenly. "But oh, have some pity for my wife and children—"

"Why did you not think of your wife and children?" asked Call.

"Because I guess I have been a 'cursed fool.'"

"Probably. But you say you will confess?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead, then."

"If I am to fall in disgrace, at least I shall not leave to my children the legacy of the saying that their father was hung as an accomplice at murder—no! I am innocent of wrong toward Dorsey Fenwick. I swear to you that when I took the bonds to negotiate, I had no idea that they had been taken from Dorsey Fenwick. He was a member of the same order to which I belonged—its chief, in fact. I was as much shocked at the account of his death as any one, the more because no one had ever been of such good service to the order as he had."

"You refer to the Order of the Golden Beetle?"

"Yes. That name was given to it at his own suggestion when we first banded together to promulgate our scheme of retaining from all the gold pieces we could gather a certain proportion of the pure metal and substitute a baser stuff, which was easily accomplished after some practice. The very night it was known that Dorsey Fenwick had been killed, the next in command, a man known as Alvaro Mandez, assumed control. And he suggested that we try and induce, by fright if necessary, the wife of Dorsey Fenwick to join us, because, as he said, he could reveal in the council-chamber when she had been persuaded there, that she was a remarkably shrewd woman and could do much that Dorsey Fenwick had done to further our scheme, she being very ambitious of wealth. This was effected, and under the alluring title of Queen of the Order of the Golden Beetle, she became one of us, swearing solemnly to assist in such plans as the council might devise for the distribution of the deteriorated coin—"

"But the bonds?" broke in the detective.

"I am coming now to that."

"Alvaro Mandez visited my office and showed me a package of Richmond and Danville bonds, which he suggested that I should try and dispose of for more gold with which to continue the operations at the rendezvous; I was to offer them at a heavy discount if I could find any market at all, in order to expedite the matter. The proposition coming from one of my most trusted members of the order, of course I undertook the task in my capacity as broker, never—never, so help me Heaven—for one moment dreaming that they had been taken from the murdered body of Dorsey Fenwick."

As he thus declared, the detective, with his long experience at reading the human countenance, concluded either that Brown spoke the truth or that he was himself a most deceived person.

"You have given this perfectly straight?"

"As straight and true as Holy Writ."

"This confession implicates Mrs. Fenwick as an utterer of the false coin."

"I am sure that she has not yet had time to do anything; I know that no money was as yet given to her—that is, none of the coin that was tampered with. Everything was in the direct say of the new leader, Alvaro Mandez; what his plans were none of the band had learned, up to the time when I believe all perished but myself in the crash of the floor at the rendezvous."

"Were you one of those who destroyed the sight of Ischan, the Indian boy?"

Brown was evidently honest in his astonishment.

"No!" he exclaimed. "I did not know that anything like that had been done."

"Were you present when I was in the council-chamber of the Golden Beetle last night, at an early hour comparatively?"

"What hour?"

The detective named the hour.

"No, I was not there."

"Did you see me there during the day?"

"No."

"Brown, if all that you have said is true, you will be lucky to a certain degree. That is, you will not have to answer for the horrible outrage that has been inflicted on the Indian boy; you will escape trial for complicity in the murder of Dorsey Fenwick. Nevertheless—"

"Well," with a return of his former sullenness, and regaining the seat he had occupied on the edge of the cot.

"You will have to 'go up,' and there's no help for it."

"So be it!"—doggedly.

Jo Call left the prisoner.

His mind was now in a great state of elation.

He was fairly on the track of Dorsey Fenwick's murderer, through a combination of circumstances which, he had to admit to himself, were as much because of chance as through any effort on his part or Tuff's.

He immediately sought the office of the broker, where the clerk who had visited the agency at once inquired:

"Have you learned anything of Mr. Brown, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"Found him?" and several of the other clerks gathered around the detective, who was making his way toward the huge safe.

"Yes, I've found him."

"Where is he?"
 "Safe—in jail."
 "In jail!"

Something like consternation prevailed upon the announcement, which came like a small thunderbolt to the admirers of Caudrey Brown, the broker.

Further to their amazement, they saw the detective deliberately open the safe and search therein for a few seconds, presently drawing forth the package of bonds.

"It's all right," he muttered to himself. "Caught on the person of the thief, as it were. If they had once been negotiated, the bank had no redress. I think Tuff and I will haul in that thousand."

"Why, what are you doing, sir?" the clerk began to protest, at this singular liberty. "That is Mr. Brown's private safe. Even I would not dare—"

"But, my youthful friend, you observe that I do dare. I shall just take possession of these stolen bonds your employer was about to negotiate, and if anything unpleasant comes of it, you may simply refer the parties making any noise about it to Jo Call, the detective. Understand?" and without as much as "good-day to you," he departed hurriedly. Straight to the agency he went.

Tuff was there.

"I found our young man, Jo. He's not in any hurry to leave town, it seems. Just gone back to his boarding-house. And he is in citizens' clothes. That fact caused me to make inquiries at the post-office. He somewhat abruptly resigned yesterday evening and quit work without waiting to see whether his resignation at the time was convenient or not. I see you have Wing-Wing pretty close on his trail, so I thought I would come back here to see if you had anything fresh—"

"I have. Sit down and share. I have seen our bird. Who do you guess it can be?"

"Give it up."

"No less a person than Mr. Caudrey Brown, the broker."

"Whew!"

Call rapidly related all that had transpired.

"You have the bonds then?"

"Here they are. Caught on the person of the thief—or the thief's accomplice, it's all the same—so we can return them to Upton Girard, or his bank, rather, and take in that little trick of a thousand."

"Good!" exclaimed Tuff.

"Here—take them. Read the numbers while I compare them with the memoranda."

Tuff took the bonds and began calling off the numbers, while Call compared them with the numbers in his diary, which he had received from Upton Girard.

"63—94—95—96—97—98—99—100—102—"

"Stop. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"You've skipped one."

"No, I haven't."

"Read them again."

Tuff repeated the numbers.

"Look through the package for 101."

This was done. 101 could not be found.

"Count the bonds," said Call.

This was done. There were only nineteen.

The two detectives exchanged glances.

Then, with a complacent smile, Call said:

"It's pretty plain, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Don't you see? 101—101. That's the number this young Albert Royal seems to have been carrying in his mind for some reason, as witness the occurrence of the number in his diary, found by Mrs. Fenwick in the garden of her mansion, and on the slate which Wing-Wing brought to me from his boarding house."

"Albert Royal has the missing bond."

"Of course."

"Have you any theory?"

"Yes. That Albert Royal, with the money which, by some means, he has obtained from the young lady to whom he was making up as a lover, and with the money which he hopes to realize from the Bond 101, is on the point of departure to negotiate that bond somewhere North, and perhaps will never come back to this section. Or, again: This Albert Royal is in some way connected with Brown, and was the first sent out by Brown to see whether the bonds could be negotiated without suspicion. Or, again: Albert Royal is in with the whole gang of the Golden Beetle, and is one of those to whom will be intrusted in turn—supposing that we had not stepped in to spoil the programme—the task of negotiating the bonds in such a manner and at such remote points as not to make it dangerous for the party offering them in the market."

"We must have a close eye on Albert Royal."

"He must be detained at the very moment he is about to board the train. That is the task I have given you, Tuff."

"And I will not fail."

Tuff departed from the agency by one direction and Call was about to go off by another, when once more Wing-Wing came in sight, his white-topped and peculiarly formed shoes shuffling over the pavement at a lively rate.

"Melican plov' man go heapee up-town, fix 'em up bessee, look heap fine mashee."

"Did you follow him?"

Wing-Wing nodded, smiling.

Then, in his way, he gave the detective information to the effect that Royal was then at the house of the murdered man, Dorsey Fenwick.

Wing-Wing was dispatched with instructions to watch the house for the outcoming of the young man.

As the Chinaman turned away the party who had previously called at the agency when the detective was absent interviewing the prisoner, came hurrying up, with:

"I have something to tell you."

"Well?"

"Signor Murguio has been at the ruins on Fourteenth street ever since the paper gave the item of the occurrence this morning, and he seems to be the most earnest in watching to see the bodies that are being dug out."

"The affair was in the papers?"

"Yes, the whole of it."

"I haven't read a paper this morning; I have been too busy."

"Here it is."

Glancing over the paper which the other handed

to him, Call saw with a frown that Bob Boswick had been too free in his report about the operations of the previous night.

It was all there—the account of surprising the criminal band at its work, the fall of the floor, the capture of one of the band, while all the rest had supposably perished.

"I can understand why the Signor Murguio is so anxious to see the bodies that are taken out," he muttered, more to himself. "If he is satisfied that the only survivor is the captured rascal, he will try to make away with him in some way—perhaps by assassination. I must give warning at the station-house."

CHAPTER XXII.

PLANNING A ROGUE-TRAP.

ALBERT ROYAL, the lover of Erminie, softly rung the bell at the Fenwick mansion.

He felt that he was intruding to some extent upon the sacred quiet of the death-stricken home at the time; but there was a motive so powerful as to sweep aside any other scruples.

The sable hall-servant answered the summons on tip-toe, opening the door with a slow cautiousness, as if he expected to be met by some one striving to force a sacrilegious entrance.

He knew the comer well.

"Can I see Miss Fenwick?" Albert asked.

"Deed, Mars' Albert, doesn't fink 'at she's wantin' fo' to see anybody; dough she *mou't* see you, sah."

Though Albert Royal had been requested not to continue his visits at the Fenwick mansion by both Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, the servants knew nothing of the fact.

"Please see her, Snow, and say that I am here and earnestly request a short interview before I leave town, which I intend doing this afternoon."

"Isn't you gwine fo' to stay fo' de fun'ral—"

"No, Snow; I have business that calls me away at once. Convey my message to Miss Fenwick, will you, please?"

"Yes, sah—step in de vestibule, sah."

Leaving Royal waiting while he hurried noiselessly to deliver the message to Erminie, Snow tip-toed away up the staircase.

An almost palpable silence pervaded the house; truly the solemn quiet of the tomb was upon it.

In a few minutes there was a slight rustle of a woman's dress.

Erminie came forward in some agitation.

"Oh, Albert!"

And for a second they were clasped in a fond embrace.

"Come into the front parlor," she said, leading the way.

And when they were alone:

"It was hardly wise, Albert, for you to come here, knowing how my mother opposes the continuance of our acquaintance."

She would not say, in the face of the fact that he had been forbidden the house.

"I could not help it, Erminie, darling. I am going very far away from you with the money you forced upon me, and in the endeavor to build a fortune upon it, so that when I do return at your majority no one can say that I am not your equal in wealth. I had to see you once more ere that long, long parting—three years; think of it!"

He was gazing yearningly into the girl's lovely face; and he was struck by the fact that there were no traces of recent tears; instead, there was an expression as if she was even then sustaining an ordeal of alarm that surely could not be caused by the death of her father, which could only reasonably produce deep sorrow.

"What is it, Erminie?"

She was glancing uneasily about.

"Oh, Albert, you must leave Richmond without a moment's delay. Do not linger, or you may become terribly involved."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You must not ask me to explain," she said, with a perceptible shudder. "But go—lose no time; get as far from this unfortunate house as you can. But I will remain true to you, Albert, I vow it before Heaven. When I am of age, you shall see that Erminie Fenwick can keep her vow well. There—kiss me, Albert. Say good-by. Do not stay here. My mother may surprise us at any moment, and then—Ah, too late!"

The door from the hallway opened, and Mrs. Fenwick stood upon the threshold, her peculiarly brilliant eyes fixed upon the lover couple in a baughty manner.

"A very fitting time for love-making, is it not?" she uttered cuttingly. "Your father, Erminie, lying in his coffin in the room adjoining this, and you holding a love meeting with a man here who, you know, has only my despicement and the dislike of your father while he lived—"

"Mother."

"Mr. Royal," turning to the young man imperiously, "you will oblige me by remembering that you were once requested not to visit this house again."

"I shall do so, madame, but before I take the last leave, I hope you will permit me to say that you are doing both myself and your daughter a very great wrong."

"We will not discuss anything."

"On this one occasion we will—as between a gentleman and a lady, where the question of superiority in the matter of wealth does not enter," he said, firmly. "You are wronging your daughter because you are regardless of her happiness. She loves me dearly, and I am sure that no man ever entertained an affection for a lady more sincere and ardent than mine for her. In seeking to separate us, you would cast an eternal blight over two young lives. Perhaps you will find, however, that such a love as ours cannot be so easily crushed; and perhaps some day you will see Albert Royal occupying a position among the citizens of Richmond as enviable as that of your husband was. That is all I wish to say, and I shall bid you good-day—Erminie—"

He held out his arms to the young and trembling girl, as if in utter defiance of her mother's presence.

"Erminie—be true, darling. Happiness will be in store for us yet."

Unable to resist the impulse of her pure and loving heart, she sprang into his arms and was folded to his breast in a passionate embrace.

In the transient moment of this exhibition of

mutual affection, there came a light of fury into the brown eyes of Mrs. Fenwick. She clinched one fist tightly and took a half-step forward, as if to interfere.

"Albert Royal," she said, in the deep voice which was sometimes peculiarly hers, "you will find that before you can accomplish what your words hint at, you will be the most disgraced of all presumptuous adventurers! Even now there hangs over you a suspicion which I, myself, have augmented in the minds of the authorities, and not even to save my daughter's name will I forego the opportunity to crush you from my path as I would any other troublesome bug that might crawl into it—"

Her passionate outburst was checked by a low ring at the door-bell at that moment.

A voice that was familiar to her ears demanded, in a way that was polite but preeminent:

"I wish to see Mrs. Fenwick, at once."

"Yes, sah—wait, sah."

Snow had seen his elder mistress enter the parlor.

Appearing at the door, he announced the presence of a gentleman at the front who wanted to see Mrs. Fenwick.

"I will see him presently," she replied. "Show him to the library for the present—"

"Pardon me, madame," said Jo Call, who stepped into view at the door, "but I have no time to wait. What I have to say must be said without delay. Please oblige me by deferring anything else you may have on hand, and attend to me."

Was she mistaken? Was there not a tone of command in his speech that for a moment occasioned her some surprise?

The glance from his shrewd eyes, too, told that he meant exactly what he said.

In a tone inaudible to the detective, she said, to Royal:

"Will you please take your departure?"

He bowed, and, with a final yearning glance toward his betrothed, withdrew from the house.

"Now, sir, I am at your service," she said, in a business-like way, turning to the detective.

She led the way to the library.

"What is it you have to communicate regarding the case of murder? Would not some other time have been more fitting than this, when we are in the sad preparation for the funeral?"

"No, madame, it would not. This is the time, and no other," he replied, a little shortly. "Detectives do not stop for time or place when they have something on hand that must be accomplished quickly. I have found the murderer."

"Ah!"

"Are you still anxious to bring him to justice?"

"Assuredly, yes."

There could be no doubting her sincerity.

"Why do you ask me such a question, sir?"

"Because, when I bag that individual, I shall use you as one of the principal witnesses against him."

"Me—use me?" in astonishment.

"Precisely."

"In what way can I be a serviceable witness in the case?"

"Simply because you know the murderer well."

Mrs. Fenwick was completely astounded.

"Explain, sir."

"I will. You have more recently informed me that the murderer was, beyond doubt, a Milanese."

"Yes."

"Arban, the astrologer, is an Italian."

She was silent, with wide and conjecturing eyes.

"Arban, the astrologer, and Alvaro Mandez are one and the same person. So, also, is Signor Murguio the same as Arban and Alvaro Mandez."

"Well?"

"Haven't you an intimate acquaintance with Alvaro Mandez, the Master of the Order of the Golden Beetle?" and as the detective put the question, he saw her strangely beautiful face grow slightly pale.

"What makes you think that I know such a person as Alvaro Mandez?" she queried, with a remarkably steady voice.

"I don't think at all—I know, madame. And I know, too, that I am now talking with a woman who is on the verge of becoming a very great criminal."

"Sir!"

"Let us not beat about the bush, madame. Listen to me. Perhaps the detectives are a little quicker in their discoveries than is always pleasant for the parties themselves who employ them. You have been shadowed from the moment you put me on the case. I know that you were at the rooms of Arban, the astrologer, who introduced you into the underground temple of the Order of the Golden Beetle. You were selected the queen of that order, to supply the place made vacant by the sudden death of your husband. He was an active and successful worker. The object of the order was to circulate gold upon the market, gold coin, that had been tampered with. Fortunately for you, you had not yet been intrusted with an effort in that direction when the whole gang of criminals was broken up and the only survivor—one—caught and juggled. Now, this Italian, Signor Murguio or Alvaro Mandez, as you choose, is no doubt a descendant of the father of the maiden, Para, whose history you gave me. He has all along been intending the death of your husband. He is the murderer undoubtedly. You see, you have even entered into a binding association with the man who killed Dorsey Fenwick—entered with him upon a criminal career. Shall I hope that, now you have learned of your narrow escape, you will take warning while you have yet time? I shall keep it quiet for your daughter's sake, if you so promise. Now, are you ready to assist in the act of bagging the murderer?"

A complete and instant change came over Mathilde Fenwick as the detective thus revealed that her transaction with the Order of the Golden Beetle was thoroughly known to him.

With an almost fiery vehemence she cried:

"Yes, I will do anything to bring to justice the murderer of Dorsey Fenwick! No oath that I made to the Order of the Beetle shall bind me, no obligation deter me from this act of justice. Tell me what I am to do?"

"You can identify Alvaro Mandez."

"Yes, if he is brought before me."

"You must bring him to your house—"

"I have not the slightest idea where he is."

"I'll tell you that. He is already under our surveillance. Write a note to the Signor Murguio, say—"

ing that it is imperative you should see him at once, at your house, here in the library. Sign your name. We will see that he receives the note. If we can surprise him some bloodshed may be prevented, for he is a desperate fellow and will not be easily captured openly."

Even while he was speaking, Mrs. Fenwick, in some excitement, was penning the summons he dictated.

Then a little plot was arranged between the two, and he took his departure—first handing to her the morning paper, which she had not yet seen, and which contained an account that showed her the facts related by the detective were not exaggerated.

The woman was thoroughly aroused against the treacherous Italian who, she argued, might not hesitate to strike at her, as he had at her husband, when he had used her for his purpose in circulating the spurious coin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALBERT ROYAL TRIES TO EXPLAIN NO. 101.

WHEN Jo Call went out from the mansion, already there were several arrivals of carriages before the curb, and those who had only known Dorsey Fenwick as a prominent and successful citizen were being ushered into the darkened room where lay the corpse.

The assemblage increased rapidly until the parlors were quite packed; and many merchants were prominent among those who had come to thus evince their final respect for the dead.

As funerals generally are, this one was late in the starting.

It was long after two o'clock when Mrs. Fenwick and her daughter had taken their last look through the glass at the white face.

And as the cortege moved away in the direction of the cemetery, the whistle of the afternoon train for West Point was sounding finally as the rushing passengers hustled one another for seats.

Albert Royal was in the act of mounting the steps of a car, as the train was even in motion, when a hard hand fell upon his shoulder, pulling him back and holding him firmly.

"You will not take that train, young man."

"Who are you?" he demanded, angrily, as he saw that the other would not loose his hold, and meantime the train had almost receded from the platform.

"Timothy Tuff, at your service."

"Unhand me instantly! I want to catch that train," and he made an effort to throw off the gripping hand.

Tuff held on.

Then the young Southerner, with his blood up, was about to give an exhibition of his muscular powers in a positive fight, when Tuff said, coolly:

"Better not try that, young man. If you don't know the firm of Call & Tuff, detectives, I'll introduce myself," and he displayed his badge.

"What does this mean?"

"That you're wanted."

"Wanted?"

"You are arrested, if you want it that way."

"Arrested! What for?" in amazement.

"You are attracting a crowd. You had best come along quietly."

Though apparently not comprehending what he could have been arrested for, Albert Royal realized that he was indeed in the grasp of a detective, and with flushed face he glanced around upon the curious crowd which the little scene had attracted.

"Will you go quietly?" asked Tuff, in a way that meant: "For if you will not, I shall take you forcibly."

"I will go."

As they moved toward the gate, the broad, smiling face of Wing-Wing appeared slyly around the jamb of the dressing-room door, and his almond eyes glanced twinklingly after the pair.

The Chinaman kept out of sight. He could not afford to let it be known, by even a surmise, that he was a regularly employed "shadow," else he might find his usefulness in that vocation suddenly departed.

"Plos' man no hop skipee—no glood tlickee—buy 'em half pricee. Wing-Wing top heap, you blef!"

Agreeably to the understanding between himself and Call, Timothy Tuff was conducting the prisoner toward the station when he met Call face to face.

Royal recognized in the party they thus met the same who had recently insisted upon the interview with Mrs. Fenwick.

"I've altered my mind a little, Tuff. Bring your prisoner to our office first. I want to question him."

"All right." And to Royal: "About face, young man—march!"

"Will you not tell me what I am arrested for?" Albert inquired.

Adding with some spirit:

"I would like to see your authority for such a singular proceeding, anyhow. Where is it?"

"Right here," tapping his badge.

"You will get all the explanation you want presently," Call said, with a significant nod.

"I tell you plainly, gentlemen, if I did not know of your firm, and if I was not aware that you are in reality conducting me to your agency in the neighborhood of Capitol Square, I would not submit to any such proceeding."

No more passed between the detectives and their prisoner during the remainder of the walk.

Upon his promise to go quietly, Royal had been permitted to act with freedom, hence there was no particular attention attracted by their movement through the upper part of the city.

When they had reached the agency and entered the private room, Call placed a chair for their prisoner, saying:

"Sit down and take it cool. We want to ask you a few questions. Will you answer them?"

"That depends."

"Well, the quicker and the more truthfully they are answered, the better it will be for you, that's all."

"What do you wish to know?"

"Did you ever see this before?" producing the diary given him by Mrs. Fenwick.

"Yes; it is my diary."

"You admit that it is yours?"

"Yes."

"How came you to lose it?"

Royal hesitated. To explain, he felt that he must involve the name of Erminie, for that he had dropped it during their stolen interview by night, in the garden, he felt sure.

Call relieved him of this dilemma by saying:

"You were with Miss Erminie in the garden of her home at an hour preceding the bringing home of Mr. Fenwick by the police, were you not?"

"It may be."

"And this number—what does that mean?" suddenly opening the diary at the page where was the mysterious number—101.

Hardly giving the young man time to speak, and closing the diary quickly again, he stepped to the table, bringing forward the small slate, adding:

"And this? Here it is again. You marked that number down while in the room at your boarding-house—101."

"Ah, I wondered what had become of the slate!" exclaimed Royal, involuntarily.

"You did, eh? Well, it came to us, and the diary came to us. In the diary and on the slate occur the same number—101. Will you tell me what it means—this 101?"

"Certainly," with a smile. "It is the number of a railroad bond."

"You are candid."

"Why should I not be?"

"You say it is a number of a bond—of a bond of the Richmond and Danville?"

"Yes."

The two detectives exchanged glances.

"How did you happen to have it? Who were you trying to negotiate it for?"

"Will you tell me one thing?" put in Royal, with an easy self-possession and still smiling.

"What is it?"

"Has that bond anything to do with my arrest?"

"Suppose it has?"

"Then there is some mistake, and it has inconvenienced me in preventing my departure on the train. I can fully explain how the bond came into my possession."

"You can, eh?"

"I had been over into Manchester a few nights ago—the night of the Fenwick murder, I think—when, on my return in the buggy which I had hired, I saw something like a folded document in the road on the Richmond end of the foot-bridge. I alighted and picked it up. On examination it proved to be a bond, as you seem to know. Its number was 101. I have several times written down the number in an idle manner, or perhaps to keep it in my memory the better, while waiting to see an advertisement from the loser. To-day, meaning to leave Richmond, I inclosed the bond in an envelope and left it at the office of the *Dispatch*, accompanied by an advertisement—which will appear in to-morrow's edition—inviting the owner to call at the office and prove his property. That is all there is about the bond, to my knowledge."

"Sleek!"

"Sir!" from the clerk in the outer office.

"Step around to the office of the *Dispatch* with this note," and he gave the clerk a hastily scribbled note.

It was not long before an answer to the written inquiry came back that a young man giving his name as Albert Royal had deposited such a bond with the proprietors of the paper, to be returned to the party answering the forthcoming advertisement, if he could give satisfactory proof of his ownership.

"Are you satisfied?" Royal asked.

"Not quite," and as he said this he beckoned his partner aside.

"What do you think about it, Tuff?"

"Simply, that this young man, having learned that the Order of the Golden Beetle had been destroyed, and that Caudrey Brown is in limbo, has taken fright, invented this story, and taken the bond to the newspaper office to bear him out in that story."

"My idea exactly."

Call stepped to the telegraph instrument and ticked off a quick message.

Inside of five minutes a policeman presented himself at the agency.

Call, pointing to Albert Royal, astonished the latter by saying:

"Take this young man 'in,' and hold him until you hear from me!"

"What now?" queried Tuff, when the two partners were alone—for notwithstanding a vehement protest on Royal's part, he was marched off, under the threat that if he did not go peaceably he would be taken by main force.

"Plenty of work ahead. We'll close in to-night on the man who killed Dorsey Fenwick," and he related what had transpired in his interview with Mrs. Fenwick.

"She has completely turned since she learned the fact that the Master of the Order of the Golden Beetle is undoubtedly the murderer of her husband. I guess you and I are a sufficient match for the Italian, are we not?"

"Presumably," with a smile.

"Then there need not be a great racket over his capture. We will just quietly slide him in almost before he knows it himself. I have laid a trap; and even the public will not see any little scene accompanying his bagging. Listen to this," and he laid before Tuff the plot he had arranged with Mrs. Fenwick for enticing the Italian into her library.

Half an hour later he was at the Exchange Hotel. But who would have suspected that in the obsequious negro-waiter who brought a note to the room of the Signor Murguio was the dwarf detective?

Signor Murguio had returned from the scene of the disaster on Fourteenth street, his interest there having abruptly ceased when it was known that there could not be any more bodies buried in the ruins.

He was on the point of going out when arrested at his room door by the apparent negro youth, who said:

"Heyar's a letter fo' you, sah."

"Ah, a letter for me? Give it me. And—a—here, my boy," dropping a dime into the black palm.

"Any answer, sah?"

"I shall see—no, there is none," with a sudden frown.

And as the Signor Murguio moved rapidly off

along the corridor he muttered, unintentionally loud enough for the disguised detective to hear:

"The perdition! How she have discovered who and where I am!"

When the negro had descended to the office, close behind the signor, he was beckoned to by the chief clerk of the hotel.

"A word with you, Mr. Call."

They retired into a room behind the office—a wash-room, where Call proceeded to remove the black from his face and don his own garments, which were there.

He had desired to deliver the note in person thus, so as to read in the Italian's face, if he could, whether it was likely that the quarry would obey the summons and walk into the net being spread for him.

He felt reassured that Alvaro Mandez would go to the Fenwick mansion.

"Since the discovery about the spurious gold coin that is being circulated, we have taken pains, for the first time, to examine some of the coin with which this Signor Murguio has been accustomed to pay his bills."

"Well?"

"Every piece has been tampered with. Had we not best arrest him at once?"

"I am attending to that. Signor Murguio will be in the jug before twenty-four hours. He cannot escape."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"YOU ARE THE MAN WHO KILLED MY HUSBAND!"

It was near the fall of another night, when a close cab came whirling up to the curb before the detective agency.

A female alighted.

Upon entering, she found there both Call and Tuff. Throwing aside the veil that hid her face, she revealed herself as Erminie Fenwick.

She was greatly agitated.

"Gentlemen, you have made a cruel mistake."

"Have we?"

"You arrested Albert Royal to-day?"

"Yes."

"On the supposition that he is a thief. And I have come here to tell you that you are wronging him deeply. He did not steal or criminally get the bond at all."

"The bond? You know something about the bond found in the possession of the young man, then?"

"I know this: that on the very same night on which he found it, he told me of it and told me how he found it. It was at my own suggestion that he waited to hear from the loser through an advertisement, and I too have watched for such an advertisement."

"How did you know that he was arrested and on suspicion of having criminally gained possession of the bond?"

"He sent me this note after his arrest."

She handed Call a note in the young man's hand. Only these few words were contained in it:

"ERMINIE:—I am under arrest and am confined because of the bond. For Heaven's sake call at the detective agency through which I was arrested, and explain to them what you know about it. Call & Tuff, Capitol Square."

"ALBERT."

To the two detectives it appeared that, if there was any collusion between the lovers, it was being admirably sustained.

The wording of the communication could not give any instruction as to what she should say.

"The young man did not tell us that you were aware of his having the bond. Why did he omit that?" said Call, suspiciously.

"He may have preferred not to mix me up in it as long as there was any possibility of escaping otherwise the suspicion that has been cast upon him. But what I tell you is the truth, and I will swear to it."

"Very well, Miss Fenwick, if you can swear to this, and if it agrees with an inquiry I am about to make in that direction, I have no doubt the young man will be promptly released."

"I beg that you will attend to it before it becomes a matter of newspaper gossip," she urged.

"I will. And now, Miss Fenwick, we must tell you that we intend to capture the murderer of your father to-night."

"So soon? But I am pleased beyond expression to hear it."

"You must not ply us with questions, I warn you; but will you please oblige us by remaining strictly away from the vicinity of the library at your home this evening—at least until you are apprised that you may appear there?"

"You do not mean to say that you expect to capture the wretch in the library of my own home?"

"Precisely that and nothing else. And it is for your own good that we advise you to remain as far as possible away from that apartment, as there may be some pistol shooting. The servants will be disposed of by your mother, who is fully aware of our intentions and has some instructions from us to facilitate the little affair."

"I will do as you request. But about this matter concerning Albert Royal. You will lose no time with that important inquiry you say you intend to make, and which may corroborate my assertion of his innocence?"

"It will be attended to at once. And now, please excuse us."

When Erminie had departed, Call said:

"Now, Tuff, we'll go and see the broker in limbo." They hastened to the station.

Caudrey Brown was in a more talkative humor than when Call had seen him last.

"We have come to ask a question," announced Call, when they were admitted to conversation with the prisoner, "which will either condemn or release another prisoner we have in a box."

"Well, gentlemen, what is it?"

"When Alvaro Mandez brought those bonds to you, did you count them? If so, how many were there?"

"Yes, I counted them. There were nineteen bonds of one thousand dollars each."

"You are sure of this?"

"Positive."

"There should have been twenty."

"I thought it a little singular myself at the time that the straight succession of numbers should be broken," said Brown.

"Do you know which bond it was that was missing?"

"101."

"Have you ever had any acquaintance with a person named Albert Royal?"

"Not in my remembrance. If I ever met or ever knew such a person in the transaction of a legitimate business, I have forgotten the fact."

"Nor in any of your illegitimate business either?"

"In no way that I remember, honestly."

"You have no knowledge then that the missing bond could have been given to a person named Albert Royal?"

"To the contrary, if I recollect aright, the man, Alvaro Mandez, who gave me the bonds, was honestly surprised himself at the absence of the bond 101."

This was all the information the detective expected to acquire in that direction.

They were shown to the cell where Royal was confined.

"If you are released, will you give your parole that you will not attempt to leave the city until you have permission from us?" Call put to the prisoner.

"Certainly, gentlemen, if it is required of me. I have no fear in my conscience for anything that I have done."

In a few minutes Royal was free.

But, though he did not know it, Call had made an arrangement with one of his trusted shadows, and as the young man went forth, the sleuth's subordinate was on his trail with stealth and vigil.

It was fully dark by the time the two sleuths had accomplished this little matter at the station.

"Now, then, to bag our big game!" exclaimed Call.

And Tuff, as if in preparation for a job that was no child's play, gave himself a hitch as if to loosen his muscles.

They expected soon to grapple with the Italian. Each well knew that Alvaro Mandez was not to be captured very easily; possibly there would be bloodshed, though by their arrangements with Mrs. Fenwick, they hoped to avoid this.

But dead or alive, they would have Alvaro Mandez.

Call carried in his pocket a warrant reading to that effect.

The gate in the garden wall had been arranged to be open for them by Mrs. Fenwick.

They entered and crossed stealthily to the thick-growing ivy that reached up and above the rail at the library window.

The rain that had been threatening for several days past began to fall at this moment in a thin drizzle.

Very likely they would have experienced some difficulty in locating the spot where they intended to make their ascent in the wet gloom by which they were then surrounded.

But Mrs. Fenwick, probably anticipating this very thing, had left a lamp burning in the library—burning so very low that, while it afforded a sort of beacon to the two detectives, it was not sufficiently strong to reveal their forms on the background when they should reach and climb over the rail.

Call led the way to the strong tendrils of the ivy.

When they reached the library they advanced to a large bookcase that had been set at an angle across one of the corners of the apartment, leaving ample space behind for the concealment of two men, with room to emerge quickly.

Neither spoke a word.

Each knew what was ahead and what both were to do.

Like carved images and breathless, they stood there in their hiding-place, waiting the consummation of their plot with Mrs. Fenwick.

As if they already had before them the man they were about to attempt to capture, Call had both revolvers in hand, while Tuff, the strongest of the two, held a pair of gleaming handcuffs dangling in readiness and in such a manner that there was no likelihood of their making any betrayful noise.

And none too soon, it seemed, were they.

At the very instant that they had been gaining the railed window of the library, there was a tinkle at the front door bell.

A handsomely-dressed Italian asked:

"Is the Mistress Fenwick at home, if you please?" bowing sinuously to the sable servant who opened the door.

"Yes, sah. Come in, sah."

Mrs. Fenwick, in evident waiting for this very arrival, emerged from the front parlor near the entrance and greeted the visitor.

"You are very punctual, signor."

"It is my honor to try and be so at all times, madame."

"I am pleased, for I wish you to transact the little business relative to my deceased husband's affairs as speedily as possible," she said, in a manner which any one would detect was intended more for the ears of the servant than anything else.

And she added:

"The papers which I desire to consult you about, signor, are in the library. Will you step that way with me?"

"I shall be honored to do whatever you may wish."

When they had reached the library, and while the Italian was walking toward a chair to which she waved him, Mrs. Fenwick, with an almost inconceivable quickness, locked the door and withdrew the key, placing it in her pocket.

She had prepared the lock previously for this maneuver; there was not the slightest sound to betray her action to her visitor.

The Italian regarded her with a curious, grinning smile from his seat, which displayed his white and regular teeth like so many sharpened pearls.

His snaky eyes fastened on her inquiringly.

"Well, madame, you are nearly as good at a guess as Arban, for you found out where to look for the Signor Murguio. How?"

"No matter. I have something else to speak about."

"Of the Order of the Golden Beetle?"

"Alvaro Mandez"—and by the pronouncing of that name Mathilde Fenwick meant a signal to the detectives who were, she felt sure, in the place of

concealment by that time—"Alvaro Mandez, you were secretly in this library last night."

"I, madame?"

"And you took from behind those curtains there, and from a black marble slab on which it was kept, the golden beetle!"

"I—a robber? You are full of a compliment, madame."

He continued quickly, and in a lower tone:

"You have heard of the disaster to our order?"

"Yes, that all are probably dead—"

"Save one, and he soon shall be. Then there will be no one to betray what we have been doing; and I think I am rich enough."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that by some scheme which I have fashioned, the man at the police-station shall die!"

"You mean that you intend to kill that man?"

He grinned in a ghastly way, and his snaky eyes grew scintillant as he nodded affirmatively.

For an instant she contemplated him.

She was thinking.

Were the detectives there behind the bookcase?

She could not know; she had neglected to arrange for some sign by which to know of their presence.

If they were not there, dangerous indeed would it be for her to do and say what she contemplated.

This bloodthirsty Italian would, without compunction, at the first sign of treachery, stab her to the heart.

But she would risk it.

"I am not surprised, Alvaro Mandez, to hear you say that. You are fond of blood."

"How do you know that I am fond of blood?"

"Because you are a murderer!"

"What do you mean by that, eh?" half-starting to his feet.

"I mean that you are the man who killed my husband, Dorsey Fenwick, and I have vowed that you shall be delivered over to the authorities!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AN EXCITING PURSUIT.

MATHILDE FENWICK uttered the words of this accusation without any excitement whatever—in that even, distinct and entirely self-controlled manner for which she was noted.

As she spoke, she stepped to the table and turned on the flame of the argand to its fullest capacity, illuminating the apartment throughout.

She had anticipated that if the detectives were in their concealment, they would now come forth to confront the Italian.

In this she was disappointed.

She dared not glance toward the book-case, lest the man before her should suspect the true state of affairs and instantly, and ere any assistance could reach her, throw himself upon her to accomplish her death.

For once in her life her haughty heart sunk with dread.

She believed that she was alone with the desperate Alvaro Mandez; and she could hope for little mercy at his hands after making such a bold speech.

The Italian had sprung to his feet, and a baleful gleam came into the already sparkling orbs beneath the dark brows.

"Ah-a! you say I have kill your husband?"

"Yes."

For at that critical juncture, when she really felt that she had gone too far and too boldly, her quick ears caught a sound in the direction of the book-case.

Like the inadvertent touch of something with a steely property, or like the sound given out by balancing a silver dollar on the index finger and tapping it with another of its kind—an almost inaudible sound it was; but sufficient for her—and she perceived that the Italian had not heard it.

"Yes, Alvaro Mandez," she repeated. "You are a murderer!"

"And you will have me in the hands of the authorities, eh?"

"I shall!"

"Never! For you will not live to accomplish that, madame!"

As he spoke, Mandez suddenly produced from a concealed pocket something like a pistol. It had the stock of a pistol, with a muzzle like a bugle; the hammer and trigger were of an indescribable intricacy and evidently of highly polished steel, with a small glass disk at the forward sight. In the midst of the complicated arrangement of the hammer was a small wheel.

The whole thing was really not as large as an ordinary revolver.

This singular weapon he instantly leveled at the head of Mathilde Fenwick while he cried the words:

"You will not live to accomplish that, madame!"

A bright, illuminating flash filled the room for a single second, like a flash of lightning. A small ball of fire sped outward from the bugle-shaped mouth of the weapon in the Italian's hand.

In a meteor-like streak it went straight toward the woman.

But Mathilde, in the same instant dodged, and as the remarkable and silent shot sped on its way, the ball, or missile, or charge—whatever it was—missed its mark, striking the wall and bursting in a noiseless spray of sparks.

"Perdition!" burst from the Italian, in a rage.

"I think I can beat that with these!" cried a voice.

Alvaro Mandez turned to behold a small-statured man, the dwarf detective, with a brace of revolvers presented fairly at his breast, and stepping from behind him at the moment, another, a more muscular personage, who carried a pair of handcuffs ready to adjust.

"Surrender, Alvaro Mandez!" demanded Jo Call, sternly.

"Put out your hands, my lark," supplemented Tuff.

"There is no escape!" cried Mathilde Fenwick, in triumph. "The door is safely locked. You are a prisoner, Alvaro Mandez—murderer of my husband!"

But the detectives and the woman counted without a full reckoning. The Italian was not as easily caught as was to be supposed.

Something like a howling curse broke from his lips, beneath which his white teeth gleamed savagely.

"Not a yet—you!"

With a quickness that was almost incredible, he ducked his head and made a dart for the window.

Call, perceiving that the man meant to make a desperate effort to escape, fired both revolvers in quick succession after his receding figure, but it seemed that the little slugs missed their mark—as had the fiery ball of the electric pistol aimed at Mathilde Fenwick—for the Italian reached the window without so much as staggering or uttering a cry.

The next instant he had cleared the sill at one monkey-like leap and disappeared in the darkness beyond.

The dwarf detective, without a moment's hesitation bounded to the window and took the same leap.

Tuff, who was a little heavier, feared to risk his bones in that reckless way; he leaned over the sill and listened for some cry or signal from his partner.

None came.

"Hello, Jo!" he called.

There was no answer.

Hurrying from the library, accompanied by Mrs. Fenwick, he gained the garden and ran to the spot beneath the window.

There was no sign either of the Italian or the daring dwarf detective. Like things of air, both had vanished.

He ran to the street—leaving Mrs. Fenwick to explain in her own way to the servants, headed by Erminie, who, attracted by the two loud shots, had come hastily and in great alarm to the library.

On the street all was quiet—and deserted.

"Confound it!" Tuff interjected, angrily. "There it goes again! Never in all my life have I met with so many balks in a case as in this Fenwick affair. Where the deuce can Jo be? But maybe—and no doubt—after the Italian. Evidently neither was hurt by the leap out of the window; a leap I would not have taken, to capture a dozen of the Alvaro Mandez stripe."

But there had always existed a known rule between the two detectives; whenever one was missing in such an extraordinary manner, the duty of the other was to seek the agency at once and wait there until the missing one was heard from.

Tuff immediately started for the agency.

He had not been in the office twenty minutes before the tick of the telegraph instrument in the corner by the wall told him that Call was speaking.

The dispatch was coming in from the office of the Richmond and Danville depot.

Briefly as follows:

"On his track. He is on the train. Leaving now. West Point. Follow and help. J. C."

Away went Tuff at his best speed, without actually running.

At the depot, he learned that the train had just gone.

"Then he must have a special engine."

The cost of such a proceeding was mentioned to him.

"Hang the cost!" he exclaimed. "I am after a great criminal. My partner went on the same train with him, and I fear he cannot effect his capture alone. Hang the cost! Bring around the engine double-quick. And telegraph ahead to make a clear road for us; for I want the thing to go!"

Promptly enough the engine was brought to the platform.

A cumbrous and rattling old camel-back; but Tuff did not stop to pass any critical opinions upon the accommodation.

Leaping into the cab alongside the engineer, he slipped a twenty-dollar bill into his hand and another into the hand of the fireman, with the remark:

"Now, then, make her bowl along for all she's worth!"

On through the darkness went the engine, puffing and straining, and increasing the speed wonderfully when the boundaries of the city had been passed.

On over the historic ground, with headlight casting a glare ahead and the black smoke from the stack wafting in billows over the swamps and woods that bordered the track for stretches of miles at a time.

In the solemn stillness of the night, the rumble and rattle awoke strange echoes that startled the night-birds at their solitary roost.

The engineer wanted to sound his whistle when they neared the little stations on the route, but Tuff objected.

"I really do not want any great racket made about it," he said. "I want to get into West Point as soon after the other train as we possibly can, but do not wish it known by everybody that we have been in pursuit of the train. Do you think you can overtake the train before reaching West Point?"

"Hardly, sir. But we won't be far behind."

"Do your best."

The fireman fed the great furnace to its utmost capacity; the engineer, with his hand on the lever, watched steadily ahead, as if striving to pierce the dead darkness beyond the ray of the monstrous headlight.

But the dispatches had been sent forward; there was a clean track for them.

Duly on the engineer's prophecy, they arrived at West Point within five minutes after the train ahead had reached the depot.

Indeed, before they came to a stop, they could discern the train hardly yet brought to a stand-still at its platform.

Tuff knew that his partner would arrange to communicate with him the moment he arrived, and he darted rapidly hither and thither for some sign.

"Of course," he muttered, "he must have known that I would hire a special and pursue. Where can he be?"

But his search was futile.

At last he accosted the conductor.

Introducing himself first, he asked:

"Did you see anything of my partner, Mr. Call, on your train?"

"Mr. Call? Well, I don't know. A detective, you say? Perhaps that had something to do with what happened back near Cohoke station."

"What happened at Cohoke station?"

"Why, two fellows jumped the train—one in a hurry and the other after him."

"Ah! You are sure that one man was after another man?"

"Yes."

"Was the first named—the man pursuing—a very small man?"

"If I remember rightly, he was."

"Thank you."

Tuff returned to the camel-back.

"Turn her," he ordered, "and spurt it back again to Cohoke station full tilt."

The engine was run onto the turn-table; ready levers plied the machinery, and soon again the great puffing thing started over the track under the detective's orders.

"Cohoke station," he said, impressively. "For I can't see anything on a night like this, and I must trust to you. Put on the steam!"

On, on, the straining monster of iron.

In the dark hours of morning the engine was slowed up, and the engineer said:

"Here she is, sir."

"Is there a siding here?"

"One about half a mile further on."

"Get into it, then, and wait for me. Don't leave until I come to you. Remember, I am paying whatever it costs, and I don't care a picayune what the cost is. Drop me here."

He had ascertained that the two men jumped from the train just after passing Cohoke.

At what he supposed to be about the right distance, he left the engine and walked aimlessly for awhile along the track, glancing off on both sides across such portions of the country as were visible beyond the swampy ground.

Far in the distance he saw a dim light, apparently from a cabin.

Toward this he made his way.

The action was a fortunate inspiration, for when he had approached the cabin sufficiently to discern its surroundings with more distinctness, he made a thrilling discovery.

He had at least struck a strange place, whether he found his partner or not.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PERSISTENT SLEUTH.

JO CALL had made a note of the distance from the library window to the ground below at the time when he had ascended by the ivy with his partner.

He knew that it was not more than fifteen feet down.

And below was a thick, soft sod.

If a person could alight on the sod upon his feet, no danger to life or limb was to be apprehended.

Over, fearlessly, he went after the Italian.

He half-expected to alight upon the man's shoulders, so promptly had he followed him.

But in this he was mistaken.

Alvaro Mandez, too, knew the exact distance of the leap he was taking, for he had on previous occasions, as the reader knows, gained the library by the same means as that employed by the detectives who were now seeking his capture.

Alighting on his feet with the surety and nimbleness of a cat, he was instantly up and off.

But not so quickly as to conceal from the pursuing detective his receding form in the haze of darkness and drizzling rain.

Call was after him like a swift phantom.

Out from the garden ran pursuer and pursued.

Perhaps the Italian anticipated that the detective would call for assistance to check his flight, and he made for the darkest thoroughfares he could select in that exciting moment.

But Call had no such intention.

He was determined to capture his quarry unaided by the police.

On, on, on, the running men.

Alvaro Mandez was then struck with what he deemed to be a brilliant idea.

As he ran, he drew forth his watch and glanced at the dial—one of those illuminated, phosphorescent dials that can be seen as well in the dark as in the light.

A pleased exclamation escaped him. He gave a backward glance to see how close the pursuer was.

Call was some distance behind, but persistent and untiring.

Exert himself as best he could and did, the detective found that he could not gain upon the fugitive, though he was counted a pretty smart runner.

Presently he realized the intention of the Italian.

They rounded a corner in the intensely gloomy locality of the warehouses near the depot.

On, on, sped Alvaro Mandez.

He even seemed to increase his gait of leaps.

A gong was sounding.

The night train for West Point was just starting.

It was already in motion.

Through the gates the Italian.

After him the detective.

The former sprang upon the cars.

A man was descending from the platform, to whom Call shouted:

"Send a telegram to the office of Call & Tuff and sign it J. C. Say these words: 'On his track. He is on the train. Leaving now. West Point. Follow and help.' Here's money to pay for it," and he tossed off to the man a five-dollar bill.

By the time he had finished, the train was winding onto the low trellis of spiles over the canal.

The man to whom he had shouted the words fortunately, was an intelligent individual.

He caught the money thrown to him and instantly sent from the depot office the telegram in exact accordance with the words uttered to him.

A brakeman was on the platform of the last car, upon which Call had barely had time to leap.

"My friend," he said, "I want you to do me a favor."

"What like?"

"I am a detective—Jo Call is my name, of the firm of Call & Tuff," showing his badge. "There is a criminal on this train. I was in hot pursuit of him when he boarded. I wish him to think that I did not make the train. I shall nab him when we get to West Point, where I expect my partner will be almost as soon as I am, for he will certainly hire a special engine when he gets the telegram you heard me ask that man back there to send up to the office. Now, I want you to do me a favor."

"Well, what is it?"

"Lend me your suit of uniform while I go through the train and spot the quarry."

"But why not nab him as it is? We'll help you—every man on the train, if you say the word."

"For reasons, I do not wish to accomplish it in that way."

"It's against the rules to shed a uniform while on duty. I'd get my discharge."

"I'll see to it that you are excused from all blame. You can attend to your duties all the same. I only need your coat and hat—Ah, and here is another who can help me materially."

The train newsboy had just then emerged on the platform, with a small armful of magazines.

"My lad, I'll pay you more than you could make out of the sale of all your papers if you will just let me conduct your business between here and West Point—though I sha'n't probably make the regular rounds as you would. Let me have your bundle."

After some argument and reasonable persuasion, his object was accomplished.

Jo Call presently entered the car and acted the part of the news boy to a dot.

As he made his way slowly forward, offering his papers and books, his keen eyes were alert for some sign of the Italian.

But to his astonishment, that person seemed to have vanished.

The vexing thought entered his mind that perhaps Alvaro Mandez had only leaped upon the platform of the car on one side, to leave it again instantly on the other.

He might not have remained on the train at all.

For an instant he confessed himself beaten.

But once more he started back through with his papers, slower than before, and scanning every face in a way that would have penetrated any ordinary disguise.

And he was rewarded!

In a seat in a car next to the last, he came across a personage with great gray beard and a broad brimmed felt hat pulled down over his brow until nearly the whole face beneath, with the aid of the hair upon it, was in a screening shadow.

"Paper, sir?"

An impatient shake of the head was the only response.

But that motion revealed to the keen eyes of the detective that beneath the gray beard there was a nearly-successfully hidden mustache of jetty blackness.

He had found his quarry!

Rejoining the newsboy and the brakeman on the rear platform, he acquainted them with the fact of his success.

"You can have your papers now, my lad," he said, restoring them to their owner, "and here's a five-dollar bill. Will that pay you?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the boy, very much pleased with the transaction.

The brakeman and the boy had been discussing the affair during the detective's absence.

But if they hoped, by watching the future movements of the sleuth, to ascertain who it was on the train that was being spotted, they were doomed to disappointment.

Cautioning the two that they must not make a talk on the train about what was transpiring, nor speak to him again after he left them, he re-entered the car.

He had returned the uniform also.

In his own proper person, he seated himself in the cushion directly in the rear of his quarry and complacently proceeded to light and smoke a fragrant cigar.

He could have reached forward at any moment he might choose and lay his hand on the shoulder of the adroitly-disguised Alvaro Mandez.

But he wanted Tuff to be on hand when he made the arrest.

Perhaps he felt a sort of pleasure in playing with the intended prisoner, like a cat will play with a mouse in its claws.

He flattered himself that Alvaro Mandez would not again escape as he had done from the library.

And sooner than permit such a recurrence, he had determined to wing him with a bullet at the very first and slightest sign of an attempt at either resistance or flight.

Suddenly there was a startling incident.

Alvaro Mandez must have discovered the presence of the detective behind him.

When the train was speeding quickly past Cohoke station, he leaped to his feet and started on a run toward the forward part of the car.

The door was not more than six leaps distant.

"Halt!" rung the voice of the detective, who was instantly on his feet, revolver in hand.

"Halt there. Alvaro Mandez, or I fire!"

The Italian—for it was he—paid not the slightest heed to the command.

Onward he leaped.

The revolver cracked.

The passengers bounded to their feet and several exclamations of alarm filled the car, mingling with the deep rumbling of the great wheels beneath.

Mandez apparently escaped the bullet that was sent after him.

He wrenched open the door and disappeared on the platform.

After him sprang the detective.

The idea that the desperate man might leap from the train gave an impetus to his pursuit.

A surmise that proved too true.

For when Joe Call reached the platform, there was no vestige of the fugitive.

Daringly had he leaped off while the train was going at a rate of speed not less than twenty miles an hour.

Call did not this time imitate the leap of his quarry.

He reached and pulled the bell-rope, giving the signal to stop—a signal that was promptly obeyed.

When the train had slackened its speed in a great measure, he jumped from the platform to the ground.

As he made off in the darkness and rain, he heard the voice of the angry conductor demanding to know who had dared to interfere with his business.

Then the train started on again through the dismal night.

Call glanced about and retraced his way along the track, expecting momentarily to come upon the mangled body of the Italian; for it had been a terri-

ble leap into uncertainty in that especial locality of embankments that sloped down to soggy morasses and tangled swamps of undergrowth.

There was no body to be found.

With the aid of his bull's-eye, he searched deep into the woody border.

And it was while thus engaged, and at some distance from the track, that he saw an engine without cars come speeding swiftly onward from the direction of Richmond, its smoke wafting in black shrouds, blacker than the night itself, into the compass of his wet, dangerous and spectral surroundings.

"It's Tuff!" he exclaimed. "If I could only stop him. He's on that engine and after me, I'll bet a phip!"

He started, scrambling, back toward the track, hallooing and waving his bull's-eye as he went.

But ere he could reach the bed of the road or attract the attention of the engineer, whose only outlook was for any possible obstruction on the track ahead, the camel-back had passed.

"Too bad!" he muttered. "I am sure that Tuff is on that engine in pursuit of me. If I only had him here. Ah!"

He aspirated the last lowly, as he detected a sound off in the bushes at one side.

It was like the crackling of a twig caused by some one stepping upon or crawling over it.

He started cautiously toward the spot.

Reaching it, he flashed his powerful bull's-eye around.

But he saw no sign of the expected human; only the dense gloom, denser beyond the circle of his flashing lantern.

But again, as he looked around him, came the sound—like the cracking of twig, and this time further off, in another direction, toward a small slope that rose beyond the belt of swamp.

He followed this sound up, and presently saw a dim light in the distance.

At the same time that he discovered the light, he distinctly observed a phantom-like form pass between himself and the light.

His quarry, he felt sure.

But, though he pressed forward smartly, he did not come up with any one; and as the light from the cabin ahead flashed forth stronger for an instant, he continued toward it.

Here he made a strange discovery.

Glancing through a window that was open, he saw the Italian, Alvaro Mandez, talking to a man whom he instantly recognized as one of the pair who had tried to make away with Tuff, when the latter played the part of Erastus De Binbow—Sam York!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SHOT IN THE NICK O' TIME.

HERE then, was one of the dens of The Roughts of Richmond!

And in stumbling upon it so luckily, the detective had also found again his slippery quarry.

Not unscathed had Alvaro Mandez escaped after that terrific leap from the rushing cars.

His dark face was a mass of bruises and blood, and one arm hung at his side limply, broken, as he learned at the very moment he gained his convenient post for spying at the open window.

"Yes, yes," Mandez was saying; "I had to take the accursed leap from the cars. He was in the seat behind me. I knew that he must have discovered who I was, even with my disguise. It is no use to disguise from these detectives. I have a broken my arm. My head, it is nearly cracked, my friend. I am very dizzy; I fear I shall faint, like a woman. And my broken arm—there is no doctor to attend it. It was a narrow escape with my life from the detective and the cars, but I am glad."

"And so am I," thought the spying detective; adding inwardly, "If Tuff was only here. Well, as he is not, I suppose I must take the chances alone. I have some advantage; I can shoot all I want to, if it is necessary—and of course it will be necessary, with these rascals, for the warrant says, dead or alive! Here goes!"

With a cocked revolver in each hand, the daring dwarf detective was about to rush in upon the villains and capture them alive if he could—dead if he must—when something transpired that thrillingly intercepted him.

Without the slightest warning by word or sound, there fell upon his head from the rear a blow that knocked him completely insensible; he had not even time to see who or what had delivered the stroke.

Helpless he lay, and a pair of strong arms grasped up his diminutive anatomy, carrying him into the cabin.

The revolvers, in falling from his grasp had not exploded.

Then the gruff voice of Lancaster said, as he brought his burden into the apartment:

"Yer warnin' were none too soon giv' Mandez. Here he is, an' I jest downed him where he was a spyin' at by the windy yender."

The Italian made no reply.

He was just then seized with a faintness caused by the combined pain of his broken arm and the terrible bruising his head had received, and staggered backward to a rude lounge at one side, onto which he sunk unconscious.

"Bind ther feller's arms an' legs, Lancaster," Sam York said. "The captain's in a dead faint; an' I'll tend to him while you fix the cussed detective."

When Jo Call returned to consciousness, he found himself enveloped by coils of tightly bound rope in strong knots that held him as helplessly as ever a victim in the constricting folds of a boa.

The Italian had not recovered as soon as York expected he would under the influence of a dash of cold water in the face and a forced draught of whisky.

He lay like one dead on the lounge, his darkly sal-low face now of a ghastly whiteness.

"He's dead, ain't he?" whispered Lancaster, coming to the side of his villainous comrade.

"Oh, I reckon not. Wait a bit. What shall be done with the detective?"

"Better wait until the captain comes around, hadn't we?"

"I'm for puttin' a slug in his gizzard without any

waitin," declared Lancaster, with a scowl at the captive.

Adding, as he glanced down at Call:

"Hullo, he's come around all right."

"I generally come around that way," remarked the dauntless detective, composedly, after he had tried his bonds and realized that there was little use in striving to escape the knotted ropes.

"Yer do, hey? Well, yer ain't a-comin' round any more when we gets through with yer, bet yer sweet life."

"Let's slug 'im anyhow."

"No," objected Lancaster, though by the way he scowled upon their prisoner, it was evident that it caused him a struggle to resist the suggestion of his companion. "No, nary time, Sam. We mus' wait fer the captain's orders."

A long wait it proved to be.

It was in the hours of morning's night when Alvaro Mandez opened his eyes and asked:

"Did Lancaster get the man?"

"Yes—thar is he," pointing to the prone and tightly tied figure of the detective.

"Oh, I'm here," said Call, cheerfully.

"Aha! aha! you follow me up, eh? You will capture me, eh? You think you are a smart one. 'Tis my turn now, you understand? Do you guess what shall become of you?"

"Oh, I can't guess much, never was good at it."

"You shall die!" hissed the enraged villain.

"Is that so?"

Call's coolness seemed to aggravate the furious fire that inflamed the breast and mind of the vengeful Italian.

He started to one elbow and said, fiercely:

"I shall wipe you from the face of the earth—you and all who shall pursue me. I am not one to be caught by the accursed hounds of detectives, you understand? You shall die. York—Lancaster."

"Heier, captain," they responded, stepping forward.

"You will set the man against the wall there. Set him so that he shall face me. He will see me straight in my eyes while I shall deal him his death. Give me your weapon."

Desperate indeed were now the chances for the unlucky detective, as he realized what was intended.

The Italian meant to have him placed against the wall, and then would deliberately send a bullet into his vitals.

But he never flinched.

"Go ahead with your circus, Alvaro Mandez!" he said, a little pale, it is true. "But there will soon be an avenger seeking you for this deed. Your race is about run. This will be the last act of your career, mark my words—"

"Do as I have bid you," interrupted the impatient and bloodthirsty Italian, to his subordinates.

Jo Call was placed against the opposite wall, facing his terrible foe.

Alvaro Mandez examined the revolver that had been placed in his uninjured hand by Sam York, to see that it was in order.

Then, with the gleam of a devilish fire in his eyes, he cocked the weapon.

The two hardened ruffians stood to one side, their repulsive visages in a grin of diabolical anticipation.

Equally with the man who was their murderous leader, they relished the anticipated assassination of one of the Richmond sleuths who had been so persistent in hunting them down.

At that moment, Jo Call, in the full realization that he was indeed doomed, closed his eyes and uttered a short inward prayer.

"Open your eyes," spitefully commanded the Italian, pausing with the revolver half-raised. "Look at me. Look at the man you would have carried to the prison—ha, ha!—but who, instead, shall strike out your life like the hounding dog you are. Look at me while I send your soul to eternity!"

"When I die," replied Call, opening his eyes for a moment, "I do not wish to leave the world with such an impression on my mind as your Satanic face would leave there."

And he added, as he closed his eyes again:

"Fire! murderer! I am ready!"

"You are ready?"

"Yes."

Bang!—the report of a revolver filled the room. But it was not the revolver held by the Italian that gave forth the ringing sound.

Closely following the report, there were two other reports.

The Italian uttered an enraged cry, as he saw York and Lancaster in quick succession reel and stumble headlong to the floor.

A cry as he felt a stinging, titillating sensation through the entire length of his arm and saw his own revolver go rattling down to the floor from his suddenly nerveless fingers.

A man dashed into the cabin.

A set of strong and irresistible fingers closed on the throat of Alvaro Mandez; a knee was pressed firmly on his breast, holding him pinned to the lounge as it were.

"Tuff!—Tuff, by all that's good!" burst from the thankful lips of Jo Call, as he recognized in this providential comer his lucky partner.

"On hand, old fellow!" was the response.

The fingers on the throat of Alvaro Mandez nearly choked the life out of that personage; and when he had relaxed his struggles, Tuff clicked a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

With his penknife, Tuff soon cut the rope that bound his partner, and as Call once more stood erect and free, he could not suppress a cry of joy and thankfulness at his almost miraculous escape from death.

"You were just in time to save my life!" he said, tremulously, and wringing Tuff's hand gratefully.

"So it seems. But let's be off with this fellow at once. I have a conveyance ready, and we'll be back in Richmond in short order. Come. Those fellows won't bother anybody any more; I shot to kill when I aimed at them—I only shot to knock the revolver out of this bird's hand when I aimed at him. Come."

Alvaro Mandez was seized between them and forced away from the cabin, while he gnashed his teeth like miniature mills and fairly frothed in the overwhelming paroxysm of rage and resistance.

Twenty minutes later, the camel-back was speed-

ing back over the course to Richmond, with the two detectives and their prisoner, whose ankles had also to be cuffed, to subdue his effort at escape from their clutches.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE engineer and fireman seemed to enjoy the success of the detectives, and the latter shoved in the coal in obedience to the urging to hurry, until the old and rickety engine fairly leaped along the rails.

"Now you may blow your old whistle all you feel like," said Tuff, as they dashed onward past the roads and stations.

And out on the night sounded the shrill scream of an oversteamed whistle, alternately hoarse and piping, in celebration of the capture of the criminal.

Mandez suddenly became very quiet.

The detectives watched him closely, and Tuff's grip never once relaxed from his shoulder, his fingers almost sinking like talons into the man's flesh. Then all was startled by a loud, screaming laugh that burst from the Italian.

"You are a smart!" he cried, and there was an accent of triumph and defiance in his voice. "You are a smart, but not so very smart as you think. No rope for Alvaro Mandez! No prison for Alvaro Mandez! I shall die as I have lived—you hear? I defy the law and you as I have ever defied you! I am beyond your power. Look! Look!"

With a wrench that set him free from Tuff's hold momentarily, he raised his manacled hands and pointed to his throat.

All beheld there a small thing like an insect of gold.

The Golden Beetle!

Tuff and Call knew it at once.

The nippers of the mysterious thing were buried in the flesh of his neck at the exact location of the jugular vein.

"A few minutes—a very few minutes," he cried, loudly, his triumph increasing, "and I shall be insensible. No art, no contrivance can bring me to life again. I shall be dead—dead—dead—" and the last three words rose above all the din and rumble of the ponderous iron wheels and hiss of steam from the escape valve of the engine.

A transient horror riveted the gazers.

And even while they looked upon the horrible exhibition, Alvaro Mandez sunk down at their feet in the engine cab, his face overspread with the hue of death.

"And there it goes again!" exclaimed Tuff, disgustedly.

"What?"

"Why, ever since we started out on the Fenwick case, everything we have attempted has resulted in defeat at the very moment of an expected triumph. This caps it all. The arch criminal has eluded us even while in our grasp."

When the engine paused at Richmond platform, Alvaro Mandez was a corpse.

Jo Call took possession of the golden beetle.

He handled the thing with exceeding care, it may be depended upon, for not being familiar with its mechanism, he knew not at what instant it might strike its mysterious poison into his own flesh.

Morning was breaking when the two detectives reached their office, after disposing of the Italian's body.

Here an examination of the golden beetle was made.

That there must be some delicate contrivance of machinery within the compass of the golden object they fully comprehended; and in view of this they summoned a well-known and skillful clock-maker to their office.

An investigation that lasted until nearly nine o'clock in the morning revealed the fact that by pressing on the sides or wings of the beetle a spring was set in motion automatically, which caused the nippers of the bug to strike forcibly into anything of a yielding character which might be presented to it.

And there was also revealed the very simple secret of the movement of the bug at such times as it was supposed to give warning of the approach of death to the party owning it.

It was upon the principle of the egg and the quicksilver trick.

A hen's egg, carefully "blown," and then with a small quantity of quicksilver placed in the vacuum, will, upon the resealing of the orifices at the ends, cause the egg to move upon the surface of a smooth and perfectly level table.

Thus had the life-like property of the golden beetle been attained by the one who understood its management, and the place for the insertion of the quicksilver—with a portion of that mercurial substance inside at the time of the examination—were easily found by the expert man who had been summoned by the detectives to conduct their investigation.

In the head of the beetle was contained a subtle poison of an unknown Indian ingredient, which, as the nippers came in contact with the flesh, exuded into the wound created by the needle-like protuberances.

In itself, the golden beetle was a harmless piece of ingenuity; under the management of a person thoroughly acquainted with its capabilities, it was a terrible weapon of destruction.

There could now remain but one theory: the Italian was the one to supply the quicksilver at the time—and in pursuance of the earlier custom of the descendants of the father of the Milanese girl, Para—when it was deemed expedient to assassinate the Fenwick who owned it.

This would cast a continued mystery over the occurrence of the fateful deaths.

With the beetle in his pocket, Jo Call went from his office to the Fenwick mansion.

Almost immediately, when he had been shown into the presence of Mrs. Fenwick, she inquired:

"Have you caught him?"

"Yes, madame."

A sigh of relief escaped her.

"But he is past the clutch of the law."

"Ah, you had to kill him."

"No, he killed himself—with this," and he produced the golden beetle, holding it toward her.

She shrunk back.

"Why do you bring it to me?"

"It was the property of your husband. It therefore belongs rightly to you. I have thoroughly examined it, and I may tell you that its mystery is no longer a mystery."

He explained to her what had been elicited from the investigation by the expert.

"I do not want it," she said.

"What is to be done with it?"

"Destroy it."

No sooner said than done.

Call dropped it to the floor, and at one crunch of his heel utterly demolished the shell, flattening it out beyond all future repair.

The golden beetle was no more.

"And now, madame, you will do me the favor to clear my mind from a slight suspicion that you had something to do with the catastrophe to your husband."

Even with all her remarkable powers of self-control, she turned a quick, startled look upon him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that on the night your husband was brought home—ay, within the very hour—you were heard to mutter the words: 'No one knows—no one suspects. I am safe!' Now, what did those words mean?"

"Who heard me say that?" she demanded, in astonishment.

"No matter who; I know that you did so speak, as if to yourself. Will you please explain?"

After some hesitation, she said:

"I will do so. What I said did not, as I see you suspect, have any direct relation to the murder of my husband. On a day shortly preceding his assassination, I had persuaded him to withdraw his deposits from the Agricultural Bank and deposit all, everything, in my name in another bank. When I saw him brought home, it instantly entered my mind that if it was known that I had so persuaded him I might be suspected, even as you have now suspected me, with conniving at his murder. But I quieted this thought by the knowledge that no one could know that it was through my persuasion that he had done so, and that no one had any reasonable cause to suspect the facts in the case. My thoughts at the time found an involuntary vent in the words, though how you ever learned of them is a mystery to me. That is the truth. I swear to you."

With this explained to his apparent satisfaction, Call withdrew.

He sought the Agricultural Bank.

The bonds were returned to the bank, with the remark:

"Fortunately, they were found on the person of the thief, or on the person of a party who was a party to the theft from the body of the murdered man, and had not been offered at all in the market. Once negotiated, Mr. Girard, and your bank would have had to whistle for them."

With the promised reward in his pocket, he departed.

Through his information, Plura was advised of the whereabouts of Ischan, who was, the detective rightly reasoned, the lost brother of whom she had spoken to him.

It was a glad reunion between the blind boy and his weeping sister, and Ischan then said:

"He was right—the man who was the detective. There is something after all to live for, since I have found you, sister!"

The pseudo-broker, Caudrey Brown, was tried and sentenced.

Nothing more was heard of The Roughs of Richmond after the killing of the two villains, York and Lancaster, by the detective.

And the electric pistol must have been an invention and exclusive property of theirs, for it has not been heard of since in the Southern city.

The foot and wagon bridge, too, over the roaring rapids of the James, has since been free from any sensation like those which, for a time, made its vicinity a terror to pedestrians and other travelers.

The fact that Dorsey Fenwick had been connected with the Order of the Golden Beetle was withheld from the public gorge over the revelations of Fourteenth street.

Mrs. Fenwick and Erminie were both very prompt to cancel their obligation of promise to the firm of Call & Tuff, in the shape of an inclosure of two large checks.

Albert Royal received a note from Mrs. Fenwick, much to his surprise, and read the following with feelings better imagined than described:

"MR. ALBERT ROYAL:—"

"SIR:—Since the varied and remarkably trying experiences of my family within the past few days, I have had cause to feel myself humbled in a manner that you and others can never know. It is a family secret. But if you are still sincere in your affection for my Erminie, I shall be pleased to have you visit us, and we will talk over your mutual affairs from a friendly standpoint. I have no apologies to offer for doing in the past what I deemed best for one who is as dear to me as if she were my own offspring; but I hope that the past may be here and now buried, and that even in the interview, which I am sure you will grant, it may not be referred to."

"Resp'y yours,

"MRS. MATHILDE FENWICK."

The answer to that note, which the young man made without delay, was the beginning of a life for him and for Erminie that promised many joyous fulfillments of their earlier dreams.

The wedding was fixed for a date one year hence—that is, a date ahead of the conclusion of this manuscript, when it would be admissible for Erminie to lay aside her mourning for her father, whom she so dearly loved, and whose erring life was locked in her bosom in so far as she had been permitted to learn it.

Thus we leave them—the lovers in their anticipation of a happy future, and the city of Richmond in the happy realization that, through the efforts of Call & Tuff, there need be no further apprehension for the present of the dark deeds of a ruffian band under a shrewd and desperate leader, or that there will continue to emanate from that city the tampered-with coin which attracted the attention of the Northern authorities.

THE END.

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